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JAMES & THE GIANT PEACH

**"DRAGONHEART"
EFFECTS PREVIEW**

Roald Dahl's quirky
fantasy comes to
stop motion life from
Disney, a kid's film
for adults to relish



Volume 27 Number 9



FILMING STEPHEN KING'S "THINNER"

CINEFANTASTIQUE

Walt Disney's HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME

THE REVIEW OF HORROR FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION FILMS GOES MONTHLY

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The magazine with a "Sense of Wonder."

MAY 1996

Disney is on a roll, and making the most out of horror, fantasy and science fiction for the family audience. Our November issue chronicled the making of TOY STORY, which set movie audiences on their ear and made film history with its revolutionary CGI storytelling. This issue provides an in-depth look at the production of JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH, Disney's puppet film fantasy from the team that brought you A NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS, scheduled to open nationwide April 12.

San Francisco correspondent Lawrence French, who did our cover story on Disney's previous foray into puppet film animation, A NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS (December 1993), returned to the Bay area studios of director Henry Selick to observe the model animation magic behind JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH, Selick's follow-up for Disney based on the fantasy classic by Roald Dahl. French focuses on the film's amazing CGI visual effects, which supplement Selick's traditional stop-motion repertoire, and highlights the hands-on artistry involved in the film's stop-motion puppetry, a technique that hasn't changed much from the silent movie days of Willis O'Brien, or his low-budget acolyte Ray Harryhausen. French also looks at the character designs of children's book illustrator Lane Smith, the checkered filmography of fantasy master Roald Dahl, and the controversy behind Selick's split with the project's stop-motion godfather, Tim Burton.

Also this issue, a preview of THINNER, director Tom Holland's movie adaptation of Stephen King's horror tale, which Paramount opens nationwide May 3. Maine correspondent Steve LaCroix reports from the set on location in King country and reveals how Holland has toned down the horror elements in favor of a DOLORES CLAIBORNE approach. LaCroix also looks at the amazing makeup of Greg Cannom, taking former Robocop Robert Burke from over 300 pounds down to 120, 40 less than Burke weighed!

Frederick S. Clarke



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Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi, Lon Chaney Jr.—collectively they made over 500 films. Now their children hope the Post Office will issue stamps honoring the men behind the monsters. / Article by Dennis Fischer

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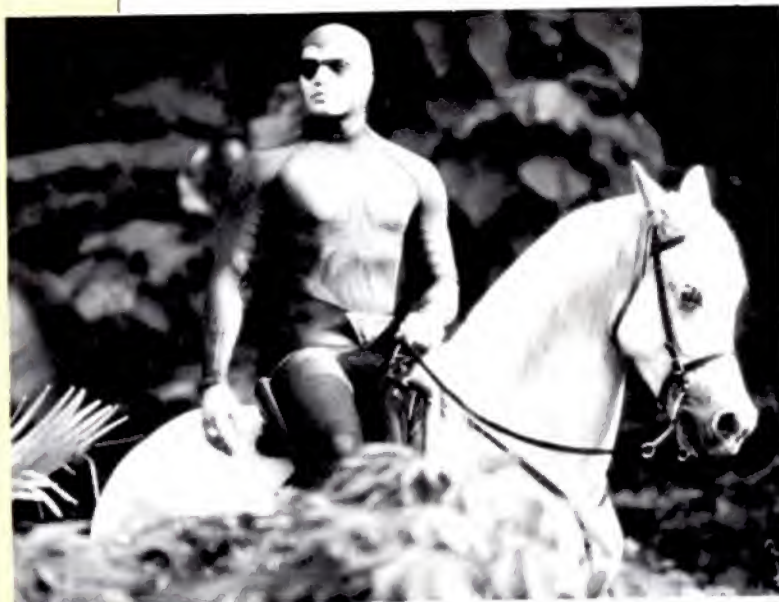
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EAGERLY AWAITED

THE PHANTOM (Paramount)

Phantom fans around the world are eagerly awaiting the first big-screen appearance of Lee Falk's comic strip hero since the Columbia serial of 1943. The big-budget film, produced by Alan Ladd Jr. and Robert Evans, was written by Jeffrey Boam and directed by Simon Wincer (who directed the excellent Australian fantasy HARLEQUIN with Robert Powell years ago). Billy Zane, memorably menacing in DEMON KNIGHT, plays the hero; Kirsty Swanson (BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER) is Diana, the Phantom's love interest; and THE PRISONER's Patrick McGoohan is the Phantom's father. The villainous Quill and Xander Dax are played by James Remar and Treat Williams. Boam based his script on the first Phantom adventure, "The Singh Pirates," with elements from another early Falk story called "The Sky Band." Shooting began last October in New York and Los Angeles; jungle and beach scenes were shot in Thailand, and the rest in a studio in Queensland Australia. **Ed Rhodes**

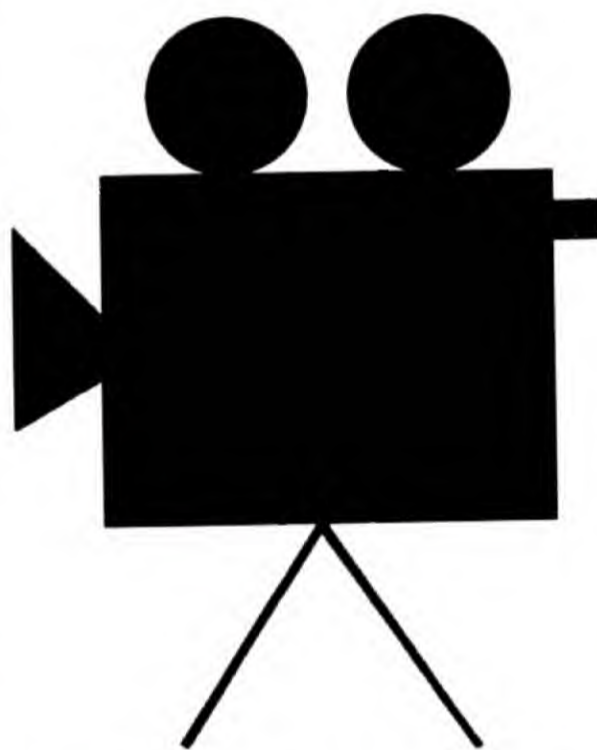
Summer



RELEASE SCHEDULE

Upcoming cinefantastique at a glance, along with a word or two for the discriminating viewer.

compiled by Jay Stevenson
(unless otherwise noted)



ALL DOGS GO

TO HEAVEN 2 (MGM)

Now playing

MGM's new animation division joins the current animation rejuvenation. In this sequel to the 1989 film, Charlie Sheen replaces Burt Reynolds as the voice of Charlie Barker. The canine hero must come down from Heaven to retrieve the angel Gabriel's horn. Sheena Easton, Ernest Borgnine, Dom DeLuise, and Bebe Neuwirth provide voices. Larry Leker and Paul Sabella directed, from a script by Arne Olsen, Kelly Ward, and Mark Young, with songs by Barry Mann and Cynthia Weill. Conspicuously absent is Don Bluth, director-creator of the original. **Mike Lyons**

BARB WIRE (Gramercy)

April 26

BAYWATCH babe Pamela Anderson makes the transition to the big screen, playing the lead in this comic book adaptation set in a futuristic second American civil war. Co-starring Udo Kier (ANDY WARHOL'S FRANKENSTEIN).

BOGUS (Warners)

April 5

Norman Jewison directed Whoopi Goldberg as the uptight foster mother and Gerard Depardieu as the imaginary best friend of a young orphan.

THE CRAFT (Columbia)

May 10

Sarah (Robin Tunney) is a stranger at her Catholic school until she meets a trio of girls (including Fairuza Balk, of RETURN TO OZ) dabbling in witchcraft. With the addition of a fourth witch, they will be powerful enough to make their wishes come true...and dangerous enough to make their enemies sorry. Doug Wick (WOLF) produced and Andy Fleming directed, from a script he co-wrote with Peter Filardi (FLATLINERS).

THE DARK SIDE OF THE HEART

Now playing (limited)

Argentine director Eliseo Subiela (MAN FACING SOUTHEAST) gives us his next excursion into surreal cinema, about an aspiring young poet named Oliverio (Dario Grandinetti) who is searching for the perfect woman—"a woman who can fly." Everyday life is interspersed with sequences involving a mysterious woman in black (Death) and a monologue between the poet and a cow that Oliverio mistakes for his dead mother. This is making the tour of the Goldwyn-Landmark art houses, so if you're interested, keep your eyes open, because it will probably play only a few days in your area.

DIABOLIQUE (Warners)

Now playing

Isabelle Adjani and Sharon Stone star in this remake of George Clouzot's 1955 classic thriller. Chazz Palminteri plays the husband they murder; Kathy Bates is the detective on the case. Directed by Jeremiah Chechnik.

JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH (Walt Disney) April 12

Director Henry Selick (THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS) combines stop motion and live action in this adaptation of Roald Dahl's children's story. James, a miserable orphan living with his wicked aunts, dreams of going to New York—and gets his wish when talking insects inside an enormous peach take him on the adventure of a lifetime. SEE PAGE 24

MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000: THE MOVIE (Gramercy) April 19

"It's different," said MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000 regular Trace Beaulieu of the transition to film. "We have to leave spaces for laughs, and the tendency is, 'Gee, there's a gap and here's a great joke. Let's put it in.' The editing can be trying. Hopefully the best joke stays in, but keeping it broad enough to play in Poughkeepsie. We try to keep the references sort of obscure—because that is what we do—but not to get so esoteric you wouldn't get the joke. We'll find that with something we're very fond of, someone else may not get the reference. It's a give and take; we'll see if we were successful. I think we were—you fight for those Bootsie Collins lines and give up a Marion Anderson reference here and there." SEE CFQ 27:8 **Dan Persons**

OLIVER AND COMPANY (Walt Disney)

Now playing

Back after an eight-year absence from the big screen is this animated adaptation of Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, set in modern New York. Taurean Blacque, Roscoe Lee Browne, Dom DeLuise, Billy Joel, Robert Loggia, Cheech Marin, and Bette Midler provide voices.

SOLO (Triumph)

Late Summer

This action-packed science fiction flick, starring Mario Van Peebles and William Sandler, about a cybernetic warrior who starts to question his programming, was moved back from a planned April release, probably to August. SEE PAGE 6.

THEODORE REX (New Line)

Now playing

Academy Award-winner Whoopi Goldberg shares top billing in the family fantasy with an animatronic talking T-Rex named Theodore. SEE CFQ 27:4-5

THINNER (PARAMOUNT)

May 3

Tom Holland directs this Stephen King adaptation scripted by Michael McDowell, about an overweight man (Robert John Burke) who kills a gypsy in a car accident and gets off scott free—until a curse inflicts an unstoppable, continuous weight loss. SEE PAGE 10

ROALD DAHL REVIVAL

MATILDA (Sony)

Danny DeVito directs and stars with wife, Rhea Perlman, in this adaptation of Roald Dahl's fantasy. Like many of Dahl's stories, *Matilda* concerns a neglected child who has to overcome the sadistic bullying of her school headmistress, Miss Trunchbull (Pam Ferris); in this case, Matilda, the young girl, turns the tables on her tormentor with telekinetic powers. DeVito grabbed the rights after losing out to Disney in a bidding war for *James and the Giant Peach*. A Dahl fan, DeVito may be able to stay truer to the author's black humor and the cruelty of the villainess than Disney ever would allow in *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH*. As *JAMES'* screenwriter Karey Kirkpatrick points out, "Dahl had some very cruel scenes in *Matilda*, like Trunchbull grabbing kids by the pig-tails, swinging them around, and throwing them out of windows. Disney would never allow that; they'd think it was going too far." **Lawrence French**

July 26



HOLLYWOOD GOTHIC

RESURRECTING RIPLEY

Sigourney Weaver on ALIEN IV.

by Alan Jones

It seems audiences can't get enough of actress Sigourney Weaver as Ripley in the landmark science fiction series begun by director Ridley Scott with *ALIEN* (1979) and continued by James Cameron in *ALIENS* (1986) and David Fincher in *ALIEN³* (1992). But didn't Ripley die? No matter: Joss Whedon's script for *ALIEN 4*—titled *ALIEN: RESURRECTION*—apparently has Ripley cloned from DNA in a scrap of flesh found in the furnace into which she selflessly plunged at the climax of *ALIEN³*.

From the Prague locations of *SNOW WHITE IN THE BLACK FOREST* in which she plays the wicked stepmother, Weaver refused to confirm the cloning rumor. Yet she did admit to being interested in returning to the series for one prime reason. "In America—not Europe, where it was well received—audiences seem to think *ALIEN³* didn't happen," she said. "They didn't like it and couldn't accept that Ripley was gone. It was as if they collectively said, 'You're going to wake up. It was all a dream.' American audiences skipped *ALIEN³*. They are still waiting for *ALIENS* to finish!

"That reaction has left me feeling incomplete. One of the reasons I wanted Ripley to die was to free the series to go off into different tangents. I didn't want to be doomed to wake up in another horrible place screaming, 'There's a monster on the spaceship!' I didn't want Ripley to become a joke. I wanted the character to die because I was proud of what we'd accomplished with the series and didn't want to run the idea into the ground with lots of terrible sequels."

"Twentieth Century-Fox sent me quite a wonderful script with an interesting premise," she said. "I've made some suggestions, so we'll see. I really like [Fox President] Tom Rothman and while this new regime may not want to make an *ALIEN* film without me, I'm certain another would carry on regardless, especially if I made too many demands."

The plan is to release the film in the spring of 1997 so as not to compete with other summer block-



Despite Ripley's fiery death in *ALIEN³*, Sigourney Weaver is considering reprising the character in *ALIEN: RESURRECTION*, scripted by Joss Whedon.

busters, such as James Cameron's *TITANIC*. Weaver noted, "The time frame they have is difficult for whoever takes it on. If Fox follows the tradition of picking a young talented director—something I highly applaud, by the way—then you've got to give them enough pre- and post-production time. (Another reason why I was dissatisfied with *ALIEN³* was the lack of support for David Fincher, but he certainly came through on *SEVEN*, didn't he?) It is always about the director for me, so as long as they get a wonderful director..."

Newcomer Danny Boyle (*SHALLOW GRAVE*) had agreed to helm but backed out, fearing he would be

unable to put his personal imprint on the \$70 million studio behemoth. Fox, who asked Winona Ryder to costar, still hopes to shoot this summer.

"I've liked life after the *ALIEN* series," said Weaver. "I've made *DEATH AND THE MAIDEN*, *COPY-CAT* and now *SNOW WHITE IN THE BLACK FOREST*. Each has stretched me in different ways than Ripley, and I don't want to go back to *ALIEN 4* unless I have something really interesting to do. At the same time, they have written a script with Ripley in it. I could pretend it hasn't happened and get on with the rest of my artistic life. But making another *ALIEN* would only take another four months out of it." □

Short Notes

Pierce Brosnan, who helped make *GOLDENEYE* the biggest boxoffice Bond ever, has enlisted for **Tim Burton's** *MARS ATTACKS!* Taking the role of a scientist who foresees that attack, Brosnan joins a cast that includes **Lukas Haas**, **Sarah Jessica Parker** (*ED WOOD*), and **Jim Brown**. ☺ **Ron Underwood**, who discovered boxoffice gold with *CITY SLICKERS* after directing *TREMORS* and *HEART AND SOUL*, will return to the genre with *THE GREEN HORNET*. **Jason Scott Lee** will play Kato. (Coincidentally, in *DRAGON—THE BRUCE LEE STORY*, Jason Scott played a brief scene of Bruce Lee as Kato). E.R. actor **George Clooney** (*FROM DUSK TILL DAWN*) was supposed to play the title role but bowed out when Steven Spielberg asked him to be in DreamWorks' *THE PEACEMAKER*. ☺ Speaking of **Clooney**, his previously announced canonization as *THE SAINT* was also delayed because of his busy schedule. □

HOOKER COOKERY

by Fred C. Szebin

Possibly thinking that vampire hookers were too close to vampire strippers, Universal pushed back the release of *their* vamp tramp epic *TALES FROM THE CRYPT: BORDELLO OF BLOOD* from its original February release to late summer. January's *FROM DUSK TILL DAWN* may not have been the last word on the subject (hell, it wasn't even the first word on the subject), but it may have been in Universal's best interest not to compete with Quentin Tarantino's brightly burning star, such as it is.

In this newest tortuous tale from the same ghastly ghouls who gave us *DEMON KNIGHT*, an evangelist sets up a brothel with the twisted idea of attracting sinners to rid the Earth of them with his radical moral squad. But, as usually occurs in such instances, his plan gets gruesomely out of control.

Chris Sarandon, Angie Eberhart, Corey Feldman, Dennis Miller, and Erika Eleniak star in this *TALES* chapter derived from an old script originally penned by the former writing team of Bob Gale and Robert Zemeckis (the latter serves as one of the film's executive producers). After *DEMON KNIGHT*, pre-production had begun on a different script, involving a voodoo cult in New Orleans, but the fluidity of Hollywood thought postponed that tale and replaced it with the black and bloody humor of the Zemeckis-Gale tale.

DEMON KNIGHT FX geniuses Todd Masters (prosthetics), Bellissimo and Belardinelli (pyrotechnics), and John Van Vliet (FX supervisor) return to their chores for what Van Vliet jokingly refers to as "a real family-type picture!" *BORDELLO* came together for Van Vliet's team almost immediately after their work on *MORTAL KOMBAT* and *DEMON KNIGHT* had wrapped. The newest *CRYPT* caper offered a familiarity in crew, since Van Vliet and *DEMON KNIGHT* producer Gil Adler had already developed a relationship, which changed little when Adler stepped into the director's chair.

"One of the great things about Gil," said Van Vliet, "is that if you tell him you can do something, he'll give you enough rope to hang your-

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SOLO

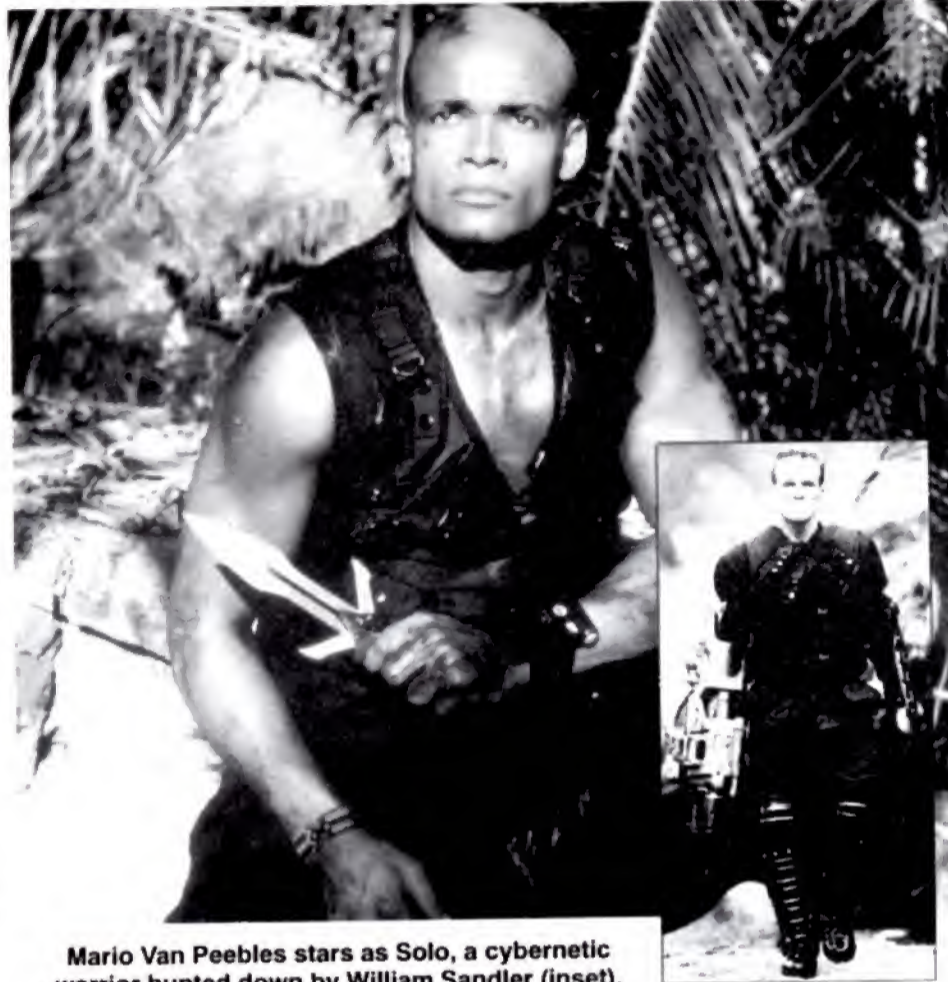
Long a DTV staple, the cyborg warrior sub-genre now reaches the big screen.

by Steve Biodrowski

Triumph Films, the Sony genre division responsible for SCREAMERS, tries again with SOLO, which stars Mario Van Peebles (HIGHLANDER III) as a humanoid cybernetic assassin whose dawning humanity puts him at odds with his creators, who want him to remain a conscienceless killer. William Sadler (DEMON KNIGHT) plays Madden, the vicious expert sent to retrieve the military's \$2 billion dollar investment when Solo escapes. Norberto Barba directed in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, from a script by David L. Corley, based on the novel *Weapon* by Robert Mason.

"I was attracted to the piece for a variety of reasons," said Van Peebles. "I first read a piece to see if I care about it as an audience, regardless of whether I can be in it. Does it pass the \$7.50 test? That's important, versus saying, 'I've got a great scene here' or 'I can play somebody different.' Which are important considerations, to be sure, but those do not a movie make.

"What attracted me to the character was the challenge of playing someone who's cybernetic in construction, but throughout the piece seems to have more humanity than the humans. How do you show that? How do you make that arc work? On another level, I have a lot of the little kid in me, and I love action pieces that may have a little something to say. I thought the first TERMINATOR worked on a visceral level, but there was an interest-



Mario Van Peebles stars as Solo, a cybernetic warrior hunted down by William Sandler (inset).

ing circle of knowledge where the father taught the mother to fight; the mother taught the son; and the son taught the father. So I think you can do an action picture and still have some other resonance to it."

In SOLO, that resonance is intended to come from the title character's awakening conscience. During a mission in Latin America, Solo disobeys an order that would cause the deaths of innocent civilians. Badly damaged, he escapes from

his military superiors, who want to have him reprogrammed, and is taken by a young boy to his village. "Not that we haven't seen all these things done before, but after you've done SEVEN SAMURAI you do MAGNIFICENT SEVEN," said Peebles. "There are similarities, but it's how you do it that's going to make a big difference. The relationship between the cyborg and the kid is very personal. The cyborg is very much learning as a child is learning. I thought it was very interesting that you had someone from the high-tech end of the spectrum learning from those in a third-world sort of existence. Here we have a perfect killing machine, someone 10 times stronger and 15 times faster than a normal man, but he's learning from ground zero, and everything in his programming has very little to do with the life he's encountering. But he's been endowed with the ability to reason, and when he's put in a very low-tech environment with these peasants, he starts to learn and become more human than the very people who made him. I look at all those little goodies and say, 'Maybe they'll never get it, but I like that stuff.'"

BORDELLO OF BLOOD

continued from previous page

self!" Every time I say something like, 'I'd like to take somebody out here and basically blow their head off,' he'll say, 'All right, go ahead.' He's really open to ideas. It's not like with some directors who don't want you to out-think them. Gil will say, 'O.K., what can we do to make this cool?' We'll sit around the table and come up with different ideas. If you present your case, he'll say, 'Here's the rope.'

"Part of what we're doing on this film with the exploding hookers was a result of that kind of meeting," Van Vliet continued. "The stunt coordinator, Shane Dixon, said, 'What if we just had parts of hookers flying around?' Off that little germ of an idea grew this major piece of work. We're doing a lot of what we call 'hooker cookery.' At the end, our big floor show is when the good guys try to eliminate all the vampires, and of course they don't just fall over and die. They have to go out in spectacular fashion. The term 'hooker cookery' should give you a really good idea. As one person who saw it said, 'I never seen people blown up like that!' It's real festive." □

Obituaries

by David Del Valle

Les Baxter

Composer and conductor Les Baxter is dead at 73, of a heart attack suffered in January. He will always be remembered for his scores for American-International Pictures during the '60s and early '70s. His last horror score was for Philippe Mora's THE BEAST WITHIN (1982), which Baxter would proudly play on his stereo for dinner guests—with all the lights out.

I knew Les quite well throughout the '80s, when he lived in a large ranch-style home in Chatsworth, California. He had tasted major success in the '50s, his biggest hit being "Unchained Melody," but when the arrival of rock music put easy listening somewhat out of style, he began writing more and more for films, such as THE BLACK SLEEP (1956) and most of Roger Corman's Poe series. He also composed new music for foreign films released by AIP in the U.S., such as Mario Bava's BLACK SUNDAY (1961). Of this period, he felt the 90-minute TV show, AN EVENING WITH EDGAR ALAN POE (featuring Vincent Price's dramatic readings of four short stories) was his best work.

Baxter earned four gold records for his works, but it is his genre scores that guarantee his immortality. My only wish is that he had not been so hard on himself and could have enjoyed his accomplishments more, instead of lamenting that he was not as renowned as Henry Mancini or John Williams. □

Production Starts

THE PREACHER'S WIFE

Denzel Washington and Whitney Houston star for director Penny Marshall in this remake of the classic fantasy THE BISHOP'S WIFE, which starred Cary Grant, Loretta Young, and David Niven. Samuel Goldwyn, Jr., is the producer; his father produced the original. The revamped script is by J.T. Allen, Jeremy Leven, and Nat Mauldin.

HERCULES

Disney just keeps churning them out. Ron Clements and John Musker produce, direct, write; Don McEnery, Irene Mecchi, and Bob Shaw also had a hand in the script. Alan Menken provides the music, with lyrics by David Zippel.

MARS ATTACKS!

The new wave of alien invasion movies continues. In the wake of INDEPENDENCE DAY, due out in July, director Tim Burton launches this adaptation of the infamous bubblegum cards, from a script by Jonathan Gems.



MONSTER MAIL

Postage stamp odes to Boris and Bela.

By Dennis Fischer

In January of 1994, Ron Chaney, Bela Lugosi Jr. and Sara Karloff filed a petition with the U.S. Post Office requesting the issuance of a set of stamps honoring Karloff, Lugosi and Lon Chaney Jr. as "The Legends of Horror." Karloff drew up a petition which she took with her on public appearances all over the country, and sent out copies with every order to her mail order business, Karloff Enterprises (P.O. Box 2424, Rancho Mirage, CA 92270), which sells photos and other memorabilia bearing the likeness of her famed father.

"Between that time and now, we have had marvelous media coverage and involvement with the project," said Karloff, daughter of the late Boris Karloff. "We've collected on our own about 13,000 signatures and had artwork submitted to us by various artists, all of which we have in turn submitted to the post office.

"We think we're very, very close to approval," said Karloff, "but we have this grave concern, if you'll pardon the pun, that the post office may decide to simply feature the monsters on the stamps and not the actors themselves." The families of the horror stars wish to enlist the help of the public to persuade the post office that such stamps should honor the actors and not just their signature roles. Those interested in aiding in this project should write to: Mr. Terry

McCaffery, Art Director/Stamp Development, 475 L'Enfant Plaza SW, Washington, DC 20260-2435. Or to their local congressman to urge the issuance of these commemorations.

The reasons for honoring these actors are many. Collectively, they made over 500 films. "As a body of work, that's an impressive contribution to the cinema industry," said Karloff. "Each man has a signature role with which he is universally and generationally identified. Their names are synonymous with the horror genre."

Karloff has fond memories of her famous father, though his busy work schedule and the separation of her parents often kept them apart. "My parents were divorced when I was seven," said Karloff. "Each remarried very successfully, very happily. I was raised in San Francisco by my mother and my stepfather, but whenever my father and my stepmother were in Los Angeles working, I

would come down and visit him.

"He went back to England to live permanently the last ten years of his life, but whenever he was over in this country, I saw him. I had two children, his grandchildren. I was his only child, so I had a very warm, close relationship with him. My godmother [Cynthia Lindsay] wrote his biography, *Dear Boris*." The book has recently been reissued.

Sara Karloff has particularly fond memories of visiting her father on the sets of *COMEDY OF TERRORS* and *THE RAVEN*, when Karloff starred with Vincent Price and Peter Lorre. "They had such a marvelous time, the three of them together, spoofing their own bogeyman images," she said. "It was great fun to see them having such fun working together."

When her stepmother passed away in June of 1993, Sara Karloff registered under the California Civil Code 990, the Celebrity

Rights Bill, for the licensing rights to Karloff's image and set up Karloff Enterprises. "We have hundreds of photographs, T-shirts, mugs, watches, clocks, pogs, magnets, CD-ROMs. We license products."

Karloff is very pleased with the recent A&E *BIOGRAPHY* of Boris. "I loved it," she said. "[Filmmaker] Kevin Burns is a fan, so he did it with great affection and great attention to accuracy and with great involvement of the family, and it made all the

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Karloff's daughter, Sara, asks for your help in convincing the Post Office.



DRAGON HEART

Screenwriter Charles Pogue on Universal's CGI effects epic.

By James Van Hise

DRAGONHEART is a fantasy in which Dennis Quaid, as a knight named Bowen, finds himself teaming up with a dragon he at first set out to slay. Unlike the more gritty DRAGONSLAYER of a few years back, what makes this dragon special is that he is more talkative than bloodthirsty. And who better to give credibility to a talking dragon than the voice of Sean Connery? This medieval fantasy co-stars Peter Postlethwaite, Dina Meyer, Julie Christy, David Thewlis as an evil king and Lee Oakes as a young, good king. Universal opens the film nationwide May 31.

The project began in 1990 when Charles Edward Pogue (THE FLY, PSYCHO III) was approached by Patrick Read Johnson (MARTIANS, BABY'S DAY OUT), who is the executive producer of DRAGONHEART. It was Johnson who had the idea for the film, which he wanted Pogue to develop and script. Written in the summer of 1990, the film took a long torturous road to the screen. Originally Johnson was to direct, but when Universal made the commitment to make it a big-budget epic, the studio wanted a more seasoned director at the helm. "That was a shame," said Pogue. "What we ended up with is pretty much the



Dennis Quaid as Bowen whose confrontation with a talking dragon (Sean Connery) is just the beginning of a beautiful relationship.

film that Patrick and I envisioned."

The studio chose Rob Cohen (DRAGON, THE BRUCE LEE STORY) to helm the project. Principal photography for DRAGONHEART was in Slovakia, near the capital city of Bratislava, from July through December of 1994. Pogue was on location for most of that time. "I went along with the location scouts so that if anything needed to be fine-tuned to a location, I could do it," said Pogue.

This movie is filmed on sites never before seen in a major Hollywood production. "We

were in some really romantic, bizarre places," said Pogue, "with incredible castles."

At the Koliba Studios in Bratislava they built various castle room interiors, but the most elaborate set constructed was of the dragon's cave. This was a huge undertaking because it took up an entire soundstage. It was the last scene shot because even though the set construction of the cave began before principal photography started, it wasn't finished until during the last few weeks of the film. There was an artisan who worked for weeks carving stalactites, stalagmites and huge boulders out of styrofoam, which were then spray-painted. Wooden support structures had to be built for the base

upon which the styrofoam constructs rested. "It was really a rather inspiring piece of work for a scene that's about five minutes long," said Pogue.

As exotic and beautiful as the Slovakia locations were, sometimes they'd need a little dressing up, such as when a waterfall was needed for a scene, a waterfall which disguised the entrance to the cave of the dragon. This was the work of Benjamin Fernandez who supervised the construction of the waterfall and the small lake in front of it. This was a key location because it is where the knight, Bowen (Den-



CGI dragon effects for the project are the work of Lucasfilm's ILM.

nis Quaid) first meets the dragon.

The relationship between the dragon and the knight form the heart of DRAGONHEART. As Chuck Pogue explained it, the pair are revealed to be kindred souls, even though only one of them is human. "They both have been disillusioned and beaten up by the world and have gone away to lick their wounds," said the screenwriter. "They meet up with each other under hostile circumstances in the beginning and then realize they have a common ground."

Pogue has nothing but praise for the hardworking star of the film. "I think Dennis Quaid is a superb actor," he said. "What I like about Dennis is that he always picks difficult, strange, offbeat kinds of things. He makes real dangerous choices, and many ways this is a dangerous choice. He has a great panache that works very well

Facing a dragon's tail broadside.





DRAGON FOR ALL SEASONS

“It’s a kind of Errol Flynn meets Ray Harryhausen,” said Pogue. “It’s a very mature, layered work, but one that children will love, like GUNGA DIN.”

Right: Pogue on location in Slovakia, at work cutting lines in the script.

for this. He exhibits a nice range in this picture. He had to act against nothing so often, that you can get any kind of performance at all is amazing.”

What made it so difficult for Quaid in particular is that virtually every scene with the dragon will be CGI, so he had no co-star to react to in many scenes. Since the dragon would be added to the finished film later, the actor would either play to a recording of Sean Connery’s dragon dialogue, or else somebody would feed him the necessary lines he’d reply to. But essentially Quaid would often be playing to a stick in the ground where the dragon would later appear long into post-production. While JURASSIC PARK was a liberal mix of full scale mock-ups and CGI, only a couple mock-ups were made for DRAGONHEART, and these for just a couple of scenes.

“There was a mock-up of a



foot,” Pogue confirmed, “and of a head for an over the shoulder shot. And we had a scene where the knight was in the mouth of the dragon so we had to build a mouth, jaw and teeth, but the dragon was then animated around that mouth. They had to bring in puppeteers from ILM and the jaws moved up and down. It’s a very elaborate piece of equipment. But aside from that there were no other mock-ups.”

Getting Sean Connery to provide his distinctive and unmis-

takable voice for the dragon was clearly a coup for the production, but Pogue states that as long as five years ago Connery was considered the ideal choice for the part when Johnson was still attached to the project as director. “Somehow that thought never left the movie and it was always the goal,” said Pogue. “I

think that Sean had read a draft of the script very early on, and was positively disposed to the material.” Connery recorded his part in 1994 in two recording sessions, one in Jamaica and the other in Rome.

The dragon, being a main character in the story, represented a considerable amount of work to bring it to the screen. The production wrapped principal live-action photography in December 1994, which is when the CGI work began in earnest. While the dragon could be de-

signed and developed before the live-action footage was completed, it couldn’t be done in earnest until the film existed so that it could be matched to the actors and the action it would play against.

Universal Pictures chose Industrial Light & Magic to do the CGI due to the excellent working relationship they’d just had with the Lucasfilm facility on JURASSIC PARK. Only the one character was done in CGI for DRAGONHEART, but this occupies about 160 shots and 25% of the film. But not every instance where the dragon appears in the story necessitated the use of CGI.

Pinned down to how he would describe DRAGONHEART, Pogue explained that, “It’s very hard to say because it’s kind of Errol Flynn meets Ray Harryhausen,” he said. “It’s a very mature, layered piece of work, but it’s a piece of work everyone can go to and love. It has comedy, but there’s grimness in it and there’s a real story there. It’s like GUNGA DIN where you had that blend of action and comedy and it crosses a very broad scope of age. There’s plenty of stuff for a mature adult to chew on, but for a kid who just wants to see surprises and swordfights and dragons and nonsense, it’s fun. It plays on a lot of different levels.” □

Right: The baby dragons faces off against a bigger opponent. Quaid’s knight errant and the dragon became friends because they have both bested bullying foes.





Filming the

By Steve LaCroix

Stephen King's THINNER reached the screen in May after a long seven-year wait. Paramount Pictures opened the latest King horror film nationwide May 3. THINNER wasn't the first King project to take some time getting to the screen. *The Stand* took 15 years. *Pet Sematary* took five, while *The Langoliers* took six. "They have all been worth waiting for," noted producer Richard P. Rubinstein, who has made a career out of adapting King's books.

"There were a variety of reasons," why THINNER didn't get the go-ahead. "In some cases, they said no because of the budget. In some cases, they said no because they didn't think the effects could be done correctly. In some cases, they said no because they thought that [the story] would have echoes of AIDS and that would be too disturbing for people. I think one thing that PET SEMATARY proved was that you don't need an up ending



King horror set-pieces: John Horton as Judge Rossington (top) turned lizard-like by a Gypsy curse; ROBOCOP 3's Robert John Burke (left) as King's thankless protagonist Billy Halleck, wasting away; and Josh Holland as Frank Spurton, dying King-style, makeup supervised by Oscar-winner Greg Cannom.



THINNER

Stephen King shockfest of AIDS-like horror.

in order to have a very successful movie. THINNER is not as horrific as PET SEMATARY; it has some fantasy elements, but it's a lot closer to MISERY in terms of its pure drama."

Director Tom Holland was so taken with King's *Thinner* that he spent six years with Rubinstein developing it for the screen. "I thought it [*Thinner*] was one of a few original pieces of material that I ever read," said Holland over the roar of voices on location in Maine. It was three o'clock in the afternoon, lunch time for the crew, and the tables were filling up inside the Augusta Armory.

Filming began on THINNER in the middle of August and wrapped at the beginning of November, on a budget of \$17 million. Screenwriter Michael McDowell adapted King's book with uncredited rewrites by Tom Holland. King's overweight, successful attorney, Billy Halleck, is played by Robert John Burke in a fat suit created by makeup Oscar-winner Greg Cannom.

When Halleck accidentally kills a Gypsy woman with his car, he pulls a few strings, and is not charged with the crime. Tadzu Lempke, leader of the Gypsies, played by Michael Constantine (PRANCER), is outraged and brushes Halleck's cheek coming out of the courthouse, muttering the word, "thinner." Slowly, Halleck starts losing weight, 100 pounds, without even being on a diet. When no one buys Halleck's Gypsy curse story, he desperately calls upon Ginelli, played by Joe Mantegna, a mobster who owes him a favor. Together, they search for the band of Gypsies, believing this is the only way to release the curse. But it's

"Steve develops characters in a very effective way," noted producer Richard Rubinstein of King's success. "He gets you to care about his protagonists."



Tom Holland (l) directs King in his cameo as pharmacist "Mr. Banghor." Paramount Pictures opens Holland's King adaptation nationwide on May 3.

not that simple.

Noted Holland, "As he [Billy Halleck] gets thinner, his soul gets thinner too, because he's mentally degenerating. As he loses weight, he becomes increasingly unbalanced."

The story, according to Rubinstein, has a "thematic connection with PET SEMATARY: ordinary people coming face to face with a fantasy element; a magic that they usually don't come across in their ordinary life. Halleck is akin to the doctor in PET SEMATARY. "These are guys who live by rules," he said.

PET SEMATARY and THE LANGOLIERS were shot in Maine, and Rubinstein took

THINNER there, too. "I've had great success following this route. And not just because Steve lives there—because Steve wrote the stories there. A lot of THINNER is written for Maine. Not 100%, but enough of it so I really felt it was important. The movie looks like Maine. You really feel the coast of Maine."

Towns like Belfast, Appleton, Port Clyde, and Augusta found themselves in the camera's eye, but Camden was the central spot and became the book's Fairview, Connecticut.

Rubinstein knows what it takes to make a successful King movie. He teamed up with di-

rector George Romero in 1987 to form Laurel Entertainment. The company hooked up with King in the summer of '79 because the author admired Romero's NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD.

"I went to Kezar Lake with my wife and six-year-old daughter and Steve's family and spent a few days," recalled Rubinstein. "We talked about what we wanted to do together and THE STAND was really our first focus. But we realized we would not likely get \$30 million to make it right away. We thought we might find a more modest project to tell the world that we could work together and CREEPSHOW was our first realized project. It was the first screenplay of Steve's. He lived next door to me during the making of CREEPSHOW for three months."

After CREEPSHOW (1982), the relationship with King didn't end for Rubinstein. Romero left Laurel Entertainment in 1985 to become a free agent, but Rubinstein pressed onward with PET SEMATARY, THE STAND, and THE LANGOLIERS. Laurel was bought out by Aaron Spelling and dissolved after the production of THE LANGOLIERS. Rubinstein produced THINNER with former Laurel associate Mitch Galin for Spelling Films International. Rubinstein and Galin have formed a new production company dubbed New Amsterdam, and their first project will be a feature film adaptation of King's NIGHT FLYER, a vampire tale anthologized in *Prime Evil*.

To what does Rubinstein credit King's success as an author? "Steve develops characters in a very effective way," said the producer. "And he gets

THINNER

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Writing as Richard Bachman, Thinner was King's last stab at anonymity.

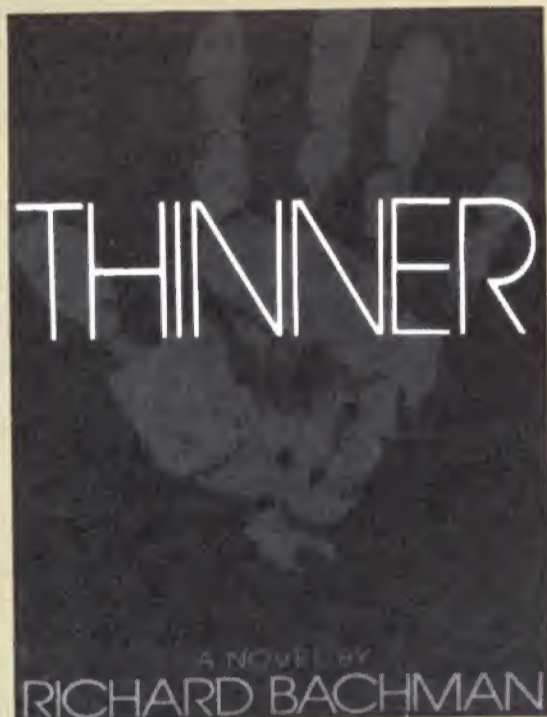
By Steve LaCroix

What's in a name? Obviously everything if it happens to be Stephen King. Author of 30 novels, five short story collections, and eight screenplays, King is one of the most popular writers in the world. Whatever King writes is guaranteed to be a smashing success. Ever since his first book, *Carrie*, which came out in 1974, King has produced one bestseller after another, delivering as many as four books in the space of 14 months, but his fans still wanted more.

King lives in Bangor, Maine, population of about 34,000, and the people there treat him like he's just one of them. Maybe this is why he stays so down to earth and doesn't flaunt his wealth. Usually dressed in a T-shirt, jeans, and sneakers, King takes the familiar sights of Maine and incorporates them into his books, making such fictional towns as Castle Rock and Derry seem so real.

But there was one fictional stunt King couldn't pull off and that was trying to write under another name: Richard Bachman.

It was 1977 when Richard Bachman surfaced with a book titled *Rage*, a story about a teenager in Placerville, Maine, who holds his classroom hostage at gunpoint. The book didn't sell many copies and, with the media hushed, King thought he could get away with it again. A second Bachman book, *The Long Walk*, came out in 1979; a third, *Roadwork*, in 1981, followed



Under King's pseudonym, the book sold just 28,000 copies, compared to 300,000 copies when reprinted under King's own byline.

by *The Running Man* in 1982. It was around this time the media started putting pieces together. The writing style of Bachman and King were too similar.

But this did not stop King. Richard Bachman was back from the grave. Writing on inspiration, while on a diet, King wrote Bachman's fifth and final novel, *Thinner*. Suspicion grew. Even the bogus picture of Bachman on the book's dust cover didn't fool readers. It was later revealed to be Richard Manuel, a friend of King's agent in Minnesota who built houses. King wondered whether or not to blow Bachman's cover. He decided to keep it hushed for as long as he could.

Thinner was Richard Bachman's shot at the big time. The book sold the best out of the five, selling over 28,000 hardcover copies, but *Thinner* seemed to give Stephen King's identity away. Set in Connecti-

cut at first, the book moves to Maine at the end (obviously King country) and a line of dialogue reads, "You were starting to sound a little like a Stephen King novel." It seemed to be too much for the reading audience to accept and so someone started investigating.

The author's bio, according to the dust jacket read, "Richard Bachman, who was born in New York in the early 1940s, joined the Coast Guard after high school, sailed with the merchant marines for ten years, then settled with his wife, Claudia Inez, in New Hampshire to tend a small dairy farm, had a son, who accidentally drowned in a well at the age of six." Bachman died in February of 1985, when King announced that he was really Bachman in his hometown paper, *The Bangor Daily News*. After the fact, *Thinner* sold over 300,000 copies under King's name versus Bachman's 28,000.

Even though Bachman was gone, King's experiment led to other projects and take-offs. Pieces like *Misery*, which would have been Bachman's sixth book, and *The Dark Half* definitely tell tales inspired by Bachman.

In Douglas E. Winter's book, *Stephen King: The Art of Darkness*, King explained why he wrote under the pseudonym. "To publish stuff when I didn't want to be Stephen King. Paul McCartney used to talk about the idea of the Beatles going around to small clubs, playing gigs in masks or something—anything but as the Beatles. That's what Richard Bachman tried to do." □

you to care about the people who are the protagonists in his books. If you care about these people, you care about what happens to them. To me, the core of THINNER is the father and daughter relationship."

THINNER is "about justice and revenge. It's about fathers and daughters. It is a story about marriages. It's about real people and magic."

The accident that sets the plot in motion is caused when Halleck's wife tries to arouse him sexually while he's driving. Rubinstein jokingly suggested the movie's advertisement on television could be, "'One blow job, four dead,' then you cut to black, 'Stephen King's THINNER, coming soon.'"

Since CREEPSHOW, King has appeared in most of his movies, usually as small, corny characters. King takes the cameo roles for publicity, to give his fans a face to put with the name that scares them silly, and THINNER is no exception.

"[King] plays the pharmacist named Mr. Banghor in this," said Holland. "And he did a very good job. I think his acting is improving, actually."

But why does King live in Bangor, Maine, when he could live anywhere in the world? In Bangor, King lives in a large, reddish-brown Victorian mansion, with a unique black iron fence, which surrounds the front of the property like a moat. King shares his wealth with the Bangor community, building an extensive ball field for the kids, and rebuilding the public library. And the author has set most of his novels and short stories in Maine.

"He's a lovely guy," said Holland of King. "He's really a very, very nice man. He still feels like real people to me. I think part of that is because he stayed up here [in Maine]. I've talked to Stephen a lot more on this than on THE LANGOLIERS. And if you listen to him talk, I think that the reason he stays in Maine isn't just because he's from here. I think that this is his roots; that somehow this place creatively feeds him. You drive around and see graveyards and Victorian houses. I think he feels protected and safe in Bangor." Then Holland chuckled at a thought. "Because

“*Thinner* is a metaphor for AIDS and cancer or any wasting disease,” noted director Tom Holland. “It makes middle-aged men and women nervous.”

you can't think of any other reason anybody with that much money would live in Bangor, Maine!”

Holland, a top screenwriter, made his directing debut in 1985, ironically the year *Thinner* was first published, with *FRIGHT NIGHT*, which he scripted as an affectionate homage to horror films. “I'm very, very proud of *FRIGHT NIGHT*,” said Holland in a low, humble voice. “I have a great deal of affection for it. Actually it was an affection that looks back at being a kid, watching all the Friday night fright films, all the AIP stuff, and all the old Hammer films. I don't think I'm as naive as I was when I did that film. I think probably all the sweetness that was there is probably gone over ten years.”

In 1988, Holland proved that he was not a one-hit wonder with the release of *CHILD'S PLAY*, his second horror film. Holland directed an episode for HBO's *TALES FROM THE CRYPT*, and made his first foray into Stephen King territory last year with the TV miniseries *THE LANGOLIERS*, while *THINNER* was stalled in development.

“I was asked almost six years ago by Warner Bros. if I'd be in-

terested in rewriting and directing *THINNER*,” said Holland. “For six years I've been trying to get this project done. I've had it set up and had it fall out at three or four different places. And always, I think, because the originality of it made it difficult for people to understand. And I also think, since *Thinner* is a metaphor for AIDS and cancer or for any wasting disease, it makes middle-aged men and women very nervous. It's like watching your own demise.”

“I've rewritten this about ten or 15 times. The first draft was by Michael McDowell [*BEETLEJUICE*] and that was five-and-a-half years ago. When you work with Stephen [King]'s material, the trick is editing, figuring out what to keep and what to let go; but also trying to remain faithful to his sense of characters. I think he's been growing as a writer, to where his concepts are original, and his characters are getting stronger.”

While on location in Maine for *THE LANGOLIERS*, Holland did some scouting for locations where *THINNER* might eventually be filmed, even though the book is set in Connecticut. Holland wanted to film in King's home state. “I went to Bar Harbor, drove along this sea



Tadzu Lempke (Michael Constantine) curses Robert John Burke as lawyer Billy Halleck. Right: The cursed dolls of Lempke's Gypsy sideshow.

coast, and I got as far as Wiscasset last year. That's when I saw Camden. I thought Camden could double up as an up-scale Connecticut town.”

Holland began casting the film in February 1995 in New York, then moved to Maine in May to prepare for location filming, which began last August. The film's biggest challenge for Holland has been its extensive makeup work. “It's very, very difficult pulling off, taking a guy from 300 pounds down to 124 pounds,” said Holland. “And it's only due to the brilliance of Greg Cannom that we're being as successful as we are with that. It is a huge makeup challenge. Bob Burke weighed 180. He lost 20 pounds. Cannom puts him in the fat suit and took the fat suit down and has put various pieces on him to make him look even



thinner. God, [Burke's] spending four, five to six hours a day in the makeup chair.”

Noted Burke of the demanding role, “He's the classic protagonist. He's got enough height from which to fall. He's an outstanding citizen, successful lawyer, loving husband, good father. He's your average, professional, upper middle-class guy.” Burke's Halleck is an attorney whose life is going all too well, except he can't seem to shake a pound as his doctor wishes. Then Billy kills a Gypsy woman with his car, and life takes a turn for the worse.

According to Burke, his starring role in *ROBOCOP 3*, with its effects rigors, prepared him for the role in *THINNER*. For the role of Halleck, Burke is all but unrecognizable at the film's beginning in an obese body suit, designed by Greg Cannom, to make him look over 300 pounds.

“I'm an actor who enjoys anonymity—I like leaving the trailer as Billy Halleck,” laughed Burke. “No. That's just kind of the way it's been, having done *ROBOCOP 3*. When I found out I was going to be offered this role, I was able to sit down and seriously think about what was going to be involved and visualize myself sitting here under the brush of [makeup



Burke in the makeup chair, as the 300-pound Halleck, with makeup Oscar-winner Greg Cannom. Below: Burke lost 20 pounds for the role.





Robert John Burke as Billy Halleck (l), continuing to lose weight no matter how much he eats, consoled by Ginelli (Joe Mantegna), his gangster client.

“This is like modern melodrama, making the unbelievable believable,” said actor Robert John Burke. “With the makeup it’s like playing eight roles.”

artist] Bob Laden for many days in a row. I knew what I was getting into.” Along with his makeup men, Burke was the first to report for work every day and the last one to leave.

As Burke chatted from his makeup chair, talking into a wide mirror, Laden worked diligently, applying pieces, brushing them over, and pinching the latex material until it looked just so. The trailer was empty except for a few chairs. Where Burke sat, makeup and pieces of latex in bags were everywhere along the counter top. Only Laden knew where and how they fit in the puzzle to make Burke appear thinner. Fellow makeup artist Vincent Gaustini watched, provided advice, and helped Laden see what he might have mistakenly overlooked.

“We’re actually trying this final stage for the first time, so we’re all kind of waiting to see how it looks,” said Burke. “It’s been a real challenging film. We

didn’t have a lot of time in pre-production to test a lot of things so we have been doing that as we go. Even as we speak, we’re involved in trying to consolidate two different stages of makeup to get something that we feel a little better with in the final result. When it works, it works fabulously and when it doesn’t we have to rethink very quickly. But it’s usually minor.”

Each stage of the thinning makeup can take up to two and a half to three hours and this doesn’t include the removal after the shoot has wrapped for the day. The makeup is taken off “with something called Detach-all,” said Burke. “The chemical has to activate with the adhesive and it has to be slowly taken off. This is a very, very strong chemical adhesive that they don’t make any more. It was a surgical adhesive and if you were to pull this makeup off of you, you would take half of your skin with it.”

Corrected Laden, as he

brushed around Burke’s left ear, “It would take all of your skin with it.”

Considering the rigors of the role, it was the involvement of director Tom Holland which attracted Burke to the film. “Tom [Holland] has been trying to get this done for five years and that speaks of a director having a passion, a great passion, about the material,” said Burke. “I thought, here’s a guy, who’s been really working hard on this. He’s got a tremendous commitment to this project to see it through.” Burke also cited the script and the involvement of Oscar-winning makeup artist Greg Cannom as other factors.

Burke also liked the idea of being part of a Stephen King vehicle and listed MISERY and THE SHINING as two of King’s better film adaptations. “As a concept [THINNER] is a great idea,” said Burke. “This is like modern melodrama, making the unbelievable believable. The arc of his [Billy Halleck’s] demise is classic. It’s almost like playing eight different roles, with all the makeup changes and the changes that go with his character.”

Joe Mantegna plays Ginelli, Billy Halleck’s avenging angel in THINNER. The Chicago actor, who came to prominence in

the plays and films of David Mamet, gives weight to the role of King’s gangster, who owes a debt to lawyer Halleck for helping him beat a rap. Though the King genre is far afield for Mantegna, the role is right up his alley.

“Sometimes you just read the script and the character strikes a chord in you and you say, ‘Oh, yeah, I kind of know what this character is about,’” said Mantegna, who noted that he used King’s novel as source material. “The book was helpful because there’s more,” said Mantegna. “What you get in the screenplay is a distilled version of the book, so by reading the book, it gives you a study guide for who the person is. You draw from that, then use the lines in the screenplay to play the part.”

Mantegna sees the thrust of THINNER’s story as essentially moralistic. “If everybody had been honest and moral, none of the problems in this book could have happened,” he said. “It all stems from somebody trying to twist the rules a little bit and that’s what opened the flood gates that caused all these problems. There’s some sort of morality lesson to be learned.”

Holland noted he prefers the creative luxury of feature film work like THINNER to the budget and scheduling strictures of television mini-series work like THE LANGOLIERS. “I prefer features, because you have more time and more money,” said Holland. “The problem really is time with television. You have to shoot so much, so fast, you can’t have the luxury to pay attention to details as you can with a feature film.”

Burke admitted to being kind of star-struck when he eventually met King on the set. “What was unnerving is I couldn’t take my mind off the volume of his work,” said Burke. “There’s just so much of it. I don’t mean to

Peggy Nicholson (l) makes up Daniel Von Bargen as Duncan Hopley (r), one of the horror makeups softened by Holland.



THINNER

STEPHEN KING, HORROR FRANCHISE

*Up next, The Shining, Night Flyer,
The Mist and Gerald's Game.*

By Gary L. Wood

The King movie and television juggernaut keeps rolling. King has scripted a four-hour miniseries of his novel *The Shining*, which he will executive produce for Warner Bros., to air on ABC in November. Of the 1980 movie directed by Stanley Kubrick, King has noted that though the film has great style, he felt that Kubrick was "slumming," not fully understanding the genre. "I've often thought that I'd like to remake and direct it," King said. Mark Carliner will produce the film, to be directed by Mick Garris, who worked closely with King on ABC's miniseries *THE STAND*. Plans are to shoot the film at the Overlook, the location used by Kubrick for the movie.

King is increasingly taking control of his own movie destiny, working only with those filmmakers that he knows and trusts—Rob Reiner, Richard Rubinstein, and Frank Darabont. Perhaps King's greatest triumph, surely since *STAND BY ME*, is Darabont's *THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION*, which garnered seven Oscar nominations, including Best Picture and Screenplay. Darabont's script was also nominated for a Golden Globe and won several writing awards.

The past few years, King has placed his trust in two companies: Reiner's Castle Rock, which produced *STAND BY ME*, *MISERY*, *NEEDFUL THINGS* and *SHAWSHANK*, and Rubinstein's Laurel Entertainment, now defunct, which produced *CREEPSHOW*, *PET SEMATARY*, *THE STAND*, *THE LANGOLIERS* and *THINNER*. It takes more than money to purchase a King property these days.

Rubinstein, with his new company, New Amsterdam, will finally bring the long-awaited *NIGHT FLYER* to the big screen. Tossed back and forth

from TV to theatre, it is now in pre-production for a theatrical release. It tells the story of a modern-day vampire who uses a private airplane to get around rather than bat wings. He sleeps on a bed of dirt in his cargo hold and preys on workers at small airports. The story revolves around a tabloid journalist who is investigating the killings and the mysterious little piles of dirt always left on the small runways near the murders.

Deeply impressed with *SHAWSHANK*, King sold *THE MIST* to Frank Darabont, who is keen on the idea of doing a monster movie with the possibility of rich characterizations. A *LIFEBOAT*-type of story, *THE MIST* has a varied group of people trapped in a small-town grocery store surrounded by a mist which contains a man-eating, tentacled monster. Though Darabont is not yet certain which project will be his next, he said, "My hope is to still make [*THE MIST*] and my hope is to scare the crap out of people."

THE TALISMAN is apparently on hold due to "artistic differences between King and Amblin producer Steven Spielberg. This epic, long-winded novel, a collaboration between King and Peter Straub, is a magical journey of a young boy, jumping back and forth from our world to a parallel,

Ever since taking *THE LAWNMOWER MAN* to court for misusing his name, King has been in the driver's seat, seen on the witness stand in *THINNER*.



King keeps a watchful eye on his horror empire, exerting control over film projects, and having fun in cameos like Mr. Banghor in *THINNER*.

chaotic world, in search of a magic talisman that will save his mother from her illness. The project has a script by Richard LaGravenese (*THE FISHER KING*, *BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTY*).

GERALD'S GAME, which will represent a challenge for any screenwriter, has been optioned. The King novel tells the story of a man and wife who are involved in a sexual game that has her handcuffed to the bed within a remote cabin. When the husband, Gerald, dies of a heart attack, she is forced to look within herself for rescue. She must battle characters within her head in a constant interior dialogue while she awaits rescue. King's novel excels in not letting the reader know which dangers are real and which are only figments of her frightened imagination and cloudy thought processes. The reading experience is a direct link, a virtual ride, within the character's mind, complete with dark corners unseen, veiled not just in shadow, but in darkness. The film experience, more often than not, turns the horror of blackness into shades of gray.

King's film adapters are constantly working to overcome one simple fact, and King's master-stroke: What we don't see, or might see, is far scarier than what we do see. But without seeing, we don't have a movie. Therein lies the rub. □

depersonalize Stephen in any way, but talking to him was like talking to a super computer, super machine, the wordsmith from planet X. I don't know what.

"I said to him, 'Stephen, is there anything I should really be thinking about here, with Billy Halleck?' He thought about it and said, 'No, basically this is a movie about eating. Everybody's going to eat in this film. You never see people eating in movies. This movie, we're gonna eat.'

"I got that kind of puppy look on my face, and turned my head sideways, and said, 'Oh, okay. Thanks, Stephen.' I went away thinking, 'I can eat. I've been eating for 35 years.'"

Does the crew consider THINNER a horror movie, especially since Holland reportedly toned down the film's gruesome special effects? (See sidebar, page 16.) Mused makeup artist Vincent Gaustini, "I know some directors who get sensitive about that, when you start asking them, 'Well, is this a horror movie?' Yeah, I say it is. In my opinion it is. It is a horror movie, but what makes it a little bit cooler is that you care about Billy. I would say it is a horror film. It's got its own style. It's got some pretty broad characters. I mean, is it Shakespeare? I doubt it. Yeah, it's a horror movie, with a lot of drama." □

Tadzu Lempke (Michael Constantine) finds Halleck (Robert John Burke), after falling victim to his own curse.



THINNER

MAKEUP ARTISTRY

Oscar-winner Greg Cannom on realizing Stephen King's bizarre horror vision.

By Steve LaCroix

THINNER may be Stephen King's biggest makeup movie to date. The challenge lay in convincingly visualizing lead actor Robert John Burke at weights of over 300 pounds down to 120, almost 40 pounds less than what Burke truly weighed. The challenge was accepted by Academy Award-winner Greg Cannom (MRS. DOUBTFIRE).

When the movie was first in development six years ago, Cannom was to work alongside Dick Smith of THE EXORCIST fame. According to Cannom, by the time the project was ready for filming Smith had other obligations. Cannom's request for a six-month preparation time to sculpt and create the effects was sliced drastically to two-and-a-half months because of a tight schedule to film in late summer 1995 in Maine. "I must have been crazy to take on this project," said Cannom, laughing.

THINNER's makeup challenges were one of the reasons the film took so long to get a green light. For a shower scene of Billy Halleck, played by Robert John Burke, the camera goes from Burke's face to his oversized belly. Cannom used breast implants of silicone under the prosthetics, to provide a realistic jiggle whenever Burke moved.

For the thinning stage there were three designs, as Halleck's condition worsened, with a last, planned-but-never-filmed horrific stage, of flesh hanging down, and protruding jaw and cheekbones. Eye sockets were



Burke in the makeup chair undergoes the thinning process, prosthetics designed by Greg Cannom, painstakingly applied by makeup artist Bob Laden.

deepened and the color of Burke's skin was made very, very pale. Cannom wanted the makeup to look disturbing but not like someone who's been in a concentration camp.

Midway through filming, director Tom Holland's concept of THINNER changed, according to Cannom. Based on the performances, Holland steered Cannom away from his more grotesque designs and asked him to keep the makeups subtle and believable. Reluctantly Cannom agreed. Besides Halleck's designs, Cannom also toned-down the makeup of Daniel Von Bergen as Sheriff Duncan Hopley, showing his affliction by the Gypsy curse to be a painful deteriorizing skin disease, but dropping the idea of oozing pus.

"The script was incredible," said Cannom. "It was the ultimate makeup movie to do. There was so much. You can't even imagine how many molds are in my shop. I really loved working with Tom Holland. I liked his LANGOLIERS a lot."

Cannom noted he was equal-

ly impressed by actor Robert John Burke. "He had the perfect face to work with," said Cannom. "Plus, he's been through something similar with ROBOCOP 3. We were so lucky. He was so cooperative. He didn't lose it. If that was me, I would have lost it three weeks into it, breaking everything in the trailer."

Toning down the concept meant that Cannom's full mechanical puppets for the climax had to be thrown out. Cannom was disappointed but understood Holland's subtler

approach. Cannom pointed to the success of King's DOLORES CLAIBORNE last year as straight drama rather than horror as one of the reasons for blunting THINNER's effects. "What if the makeup did go too far?" mused Cannom about THINNER. "It's a scary thing. Until it comes out, I can't really say. But I really liked DOLORES CLAIBORNE. I thought the makeup was just great."

Cannom had two assistants on THINNER, Bob Laden and Vincent Gaustini, who took Cannom's designs and prosthetic pieces and made them work for the screen, putting in long hours on the set in Camden. Laden was in charge of laying the makeup down on the lead, Billy Halleck (Robert John Burke). Not only were the hours demanding, but the makeup was extremely challenging, and doing it day-in-day-out made for a strenuous job.

"We go through thick and thin," joked Laden on the set, taking his task in stride. It takes "on the average of one-and-a-



Cannom applies a body suit to a double of Burke for the climactic thin stage.

half to two-and-a-half hours" to do the makeup, depending on the degree of complications. "There are eight different stages with Robert Burke."

Laden has worked on numerous films, but horror fans most admire his work in *THE EXORCIST*, on which he collaborated with the legendary Dick Smith. Laden found *THINNER* similar because heavy face makeup was required. Laden had worked previously with Cannom on *ROOM MATES*.

Gaustini had worked on such films as *SUPER MARIO BROTHERS*, *CHILD'S PLAY 3* and King's *THE LANGOLIERS*. According to Gaustini, King has his model for the latter on his mantle. The makeup for Tadzu Lempke, leader of the Gypsies, played by Michael Constantine, was Gaustini's main task during the filming. Lempke places the curse on lawyer Billy Halleck when he finds no justice in the court-

room, but is not spared from the hell he puts Halleck through. "He's like 106 years old," said Gaustini. "[Tadzu] starts out with the first stage of cancer and it grows throughout the film, getting worse and worse."

Gaustini got the *THINNER* assignment through Laden, and was high on working with Greg Cannom. "Greg is great," said Gaustini. "I learned a lot from him and I thought I'd seen everything. He came in and set up all the makeup, showed us all the color charts and how he wanted to get everything applied. He leaves you alone and is very laid back about it. He trusts you."

Due to the cutback in preproduction, a lot of the makeup wasn't film tested. And due to the softening of the film's horror/fantasy angle, the last and third stage of Lempke's cancer was dropped "because we felt it was going to go over the top," said Gaustini. "The third stage was just way too much. Billy

Cannom effects ace Larry Odien (l) and makeup artist Neal Martz (r) rig John Horton as Judge Rossington for the dream sequence of his disintegrating face.



"I feel I really have to prove myself," said Oscar-winner Greg Cannom, "and that's what is scary. I don't think about it. I just sit and start sculpting."

doesn't see Lempke for about three days, then all of a sudden he's got this huge, giant cancer on his nose. It just wouldn't have worked."

Laden termed *THINNER*, "an overwhelming job without really enough preparation. No one really had enough. Vinnie and I came into this project late. I guess everyone did. That made it really extra hard. I think they felt that heavy was going to be more difficult, but it turned out to be the thinning aspect. It was just a juggling act from one stage to another."

Cannom's Halleck design, in terms of coloring, is very detailed. Laden pointed out the edges around the eyes and along the mouth as the most vulnerable areas to apply pieces to, due to their mobility. It's challenging work, but it's also challenging for the actors.

"It takes a lot of patience," said Laden, who noted that you have to allow extra time for that breathing space. Robert John Burke was one of the easiest actors he's worked with. "The problem with *THINNER* was that it wasn't just Robert Burke we needed to apply makeup to. This was a major makeup movie."

Gaustini said the film's most difficult effect involved "Rawhide Cary," the crew's nickname for the judge, named Cary Rossington in King's book, who turns lizard-like. Cannom applied the makeup first. Gaustini did it the second day for a scene in which the judge's lizard face falls apart. Gaustini applied the makeup over a mechanism by Cannom assistant Larry O'Deane. The effects artists were thrown a curve on the set when the character was called on to recite dialogue during the scene.

"The scales are put in place, with gel blood and KY jelly," recalled Gaustini of the filming. "Every time this guy moved, a scale would fall off. And we'd

have to find it and put it back on his face again. While this guy is talking, he's falling to pieces. We pull all the little cables, then all the little scales would fall. It's one of those last-minute things. You don't think it's going to work. It looked like a complete nightmare, but they pulled it off beautifully. His whole face just opens up and falls apart. It was a great rig that Larry came up with."

Cannom came close to working on King projects in the past, including such titles as *PET SEMATARY* and *THE STAND*. "I've come close so many times, but to me I got the ultimate one [with *THINNER*]."

"The greatest moment of my life was when I won that Academy Award for *DRACULA*," said Cannom. "Then I won the other one for *MRS. DOUBTFIRE*. Now I feel I really have to prove myself and that's what is so scary. I just sit with the clay and start sculpting. Ideas will start coming. I don't think about them. Otherwise, it's too overwhelming." □

Dubbed "Rawhide," the finished lizard look for Horton's dream sequence transformation as Judge.





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Skeletons in

By Michael Beeler

Back in 1972, a couple of years before his novel *Carrie* would skyrocket him to fame, a financially strapped English teacher named Stephen King wrote short stories to supplement his meager salary. He sold most of them to sexually explicit men's magazines such as *Cavalier* and *Gent* for only a few hundred dollars each. Years later, in 1978, those same stories would be published in *Night Shift*, King's first collection of short stories.

In 1992 one of the better of those stories, "Sometimes They Come Back," which was originally published in *Cavalier* in March, 1974, was made into a CBS television movie. The movie was produced by Dino DeLaurentiis, who produced six

Alexis Arquette as Tony Reno, the demon. Inset: Reno readies Lisa Porter (Leslie Danon) for slaughter.



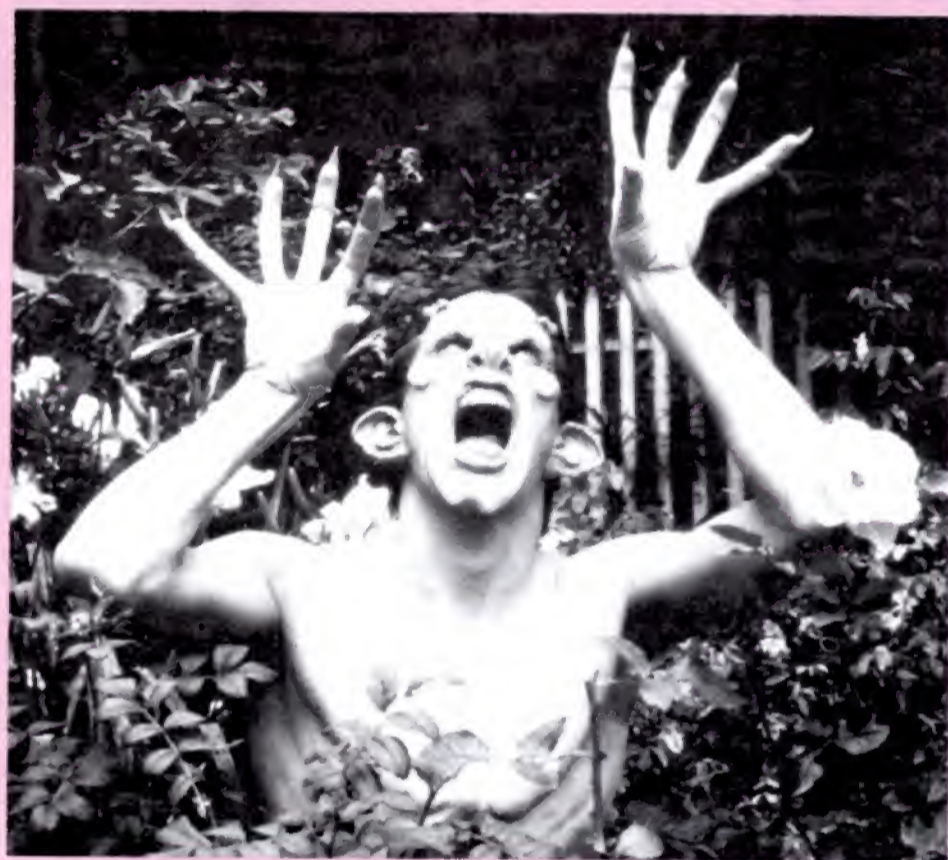
SOMETIMES THEY COME BACK II

Stephen King's closet come back to haunt.

other King vehicles, including *THE DEAD ZONE*, *FIRE-STARTER* and the dismal *MAXIMUM OVERDRIVE*, which King himself directed. Considered by many to be a real snoozer, *SOMETIMES THEY COME BACK* starred Tim Matheson of *NATIONAL LAMPOON'S ANIMAL HOUSE* fame. Reportedly the film did really well on the international market, which might explain why they're doing a sequel.

SOMETIMES THEY COME BACK...AGAIN is a Trimark Pictures film based on the characters from that CBS television movie and King's original short story in *Night Shift*. Although the producers have secured the rights to use these characters, their movie will *not* be promoted as a Stephen King film. It will simply mention that it is based on Stephen King characters. This is a result of King exercising greater control over what can be officially touted "a Stephen King film," a precedent he established with the multi-million dollar judgment won from the makers of *THE LAWNMOWER MAN*, who had illegally used his name in the promotion of their film.

SOMETIMES THEY COME BACK...AGAIN is basically a remake that retells the original story in a somewhat different fashion, which Trimark plans to open theatrically later this year. "It's based more on the characters and tries to remain true to the theme and the morality of the original," said producer Michael Meltzer. "It's still about being haunted by



Arquette as Reno in makeup by Vision Crew, a new company formed by Boss Film refugees. Arquette is the brother of actresses Rosanna and Patricia.

one's demons and coming to deal with them. We're just trying to broaden it. I think there's a conscious effort to be respectful to Stephen King and what he's trying to say thematically. And as filmmakers, we're trying to bring some of our own passions and points of view into the story."

Directed by first-time director Adam Grossman, who also assisted Gui Reidel in writing the screenplay, the remake stars Michael Gross (*TREMORS*) as Jon Porter, a psychologist who returns to his small hometown after the strange death of his mother; Alexis Arquette (*WIGSTOCK*), as the demon; Hilary Swank (*BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*) as Michele, Jon's 17-year-old daughter, who is stalked by the demon; and

Jennifer Elise Cox (*THE BRADY BUNCH MOVIE*) as Jules, a teenage psychic.

The Trimark production pretty much follows the storyline of both King's short story and the CBS movie, with a few exceptions. Instead of brothers, the new movie centers on a brother and sister relationship. And in this one the sister is killed as part of a Satanic ritual, rather than being just a victim of some ruffians whose teasing got out of hand. And the young hoodlums themselves take on a harder edge now that they are delving into the occult and seeking human sacrifices.

The main villain of this piece is played by Alexis Arquette, the brother of actresses Rosanna and Patricia. He is probably

best remembered for his small bit in *PULP FICTION*, where he charges out of the bathroom shooting and completely misses both John Travolta and Samuel L. Jackson, who consequently blow him away. "[Tony, my character,] is just someone who derives a lot of pleasure from the pain of others," explained Arquette, who relished his Aleister Crowley-inspired part as the demon. "He's less of a homicidal maniac and more of a really calculating satanic observer. Just someone that is a puritan about the worship of Satan."

"I'm not a bad guy in the film. But I do have my needs. We all have our needs. I'm simply someone who has different tastes. It's all subjective. To some people they would call it a sacrifice and to others they would call it facilitating one's soul to the afterworld. In another way of looking at it, I'm simply the gatekeeper, the helper of God's hand. So, in a way, I'm an angel."

Attempting to counterbalance and destroy the evil in this film is Michael Gross, who for many years portrayed Steven Keaton, the easygoing father in *FAMILY TIES*. In this film he plays a tough-minded single parent who must wrestle with his sister's assassins, who have returned from the grave to sacrifice his daughter to their unholy god. An accomplished actor of film, television and the stage, Gross was able to cut through the layers of horror in this story and find the essence of what King, as a frustrated, starving artist was trying to say.

"Well, I have never been a

DIRECTING STEPHEN KING

First time director Adam Grossman, sacrificed on the King horror altar.

By Michael Beeler

Adam Grossman, first-time director of *SOMETIMES THEY COME BACK... AGAIN*, seemed comfortable in his director's chair, giving the impression of a seasoned veteran rather than a neophyte.

But it really wasn't long ago that Grossman, a recent Stanford University graduate with a degree in photography and economics, was working in the mailroom at Creative Artist's Agency (CAA). Having always been interested in film, he was thrilled to be working in the entertainment industry, but he also felt stifled. Even after he was promoted to an agent's assistant, he was more interested in reading scripts than in promoting careers. So he gave his notice, enrolled in film school at USC and began making and directing student films.

Grossman's thesis film at USC was *TRAP DOOR*, photographed by his *SOMETIMES THEY COME BACK... AGAIN* director of photography Chris Bafta. Grossman's agent showed the virtual reality short to Trimark, which offered him the King project as his first feature assignment. Grossman convinced Trimark that he could make their King remake work. "[Adam] has a passion for the genre, which I responded to," said producer Michael Meltzer, whose past credits include *THE HIDDEN* and *THE HIDDEN II*. "He has a thought process. He has vision, passion, decisiveness



Baptism of blood: filming the effects with demon Alexis Arquette. Adapting King is a tricky proposition for even a seasoned pro.

and is cooperative. Not only does he have an understanding of the business, he also has a sense of responsibility for making movies."

Along with directing the film, Grossman also lent his talents to rewriting the submitted screenplay. Grossman had previously rewritten a storyline for an episode on *STAR TREK: VOYAGER* entitled "Faces." Grossman said he was to get screenplay credit on the King script rewrite, along with original scripter Gui Reidel. "If they had offered me sole credit, I would have insisted on sharing it," he said.

"[The screenplay] started from a treatment and then we were delivered a first draft, which wasn't quite what I had in mind," said Grossman. "So I rewrote the first act and the studio liked it and said, 'Okay, why

don't you rewrite the rest of it.' I did that and now it's gone through several drafts and polishes and I feel we've gotten it to the place where I like it and where the studio likes it too."

Echoing comments from Dennis Hopper (*EASY RIDER*, *COLORS*) on the passionately exhaustive process of directing films, Grossman noted that, "Making a film is the hardest job I've ever had, but it's also the best job I've ever had. I've never worked so hard. It is grueling. It's physically exhausting and there's not a lot of sleep involved here. But when you really love what you're doing, sleep is kind of secondary. I could not love this any more than I do."

Michael Gross, along with every other principal actor in this film, felt that Grossman's genuine concern and his easygoing attitude provided an environment where everyone felt free to add their creative input to the production. "I think Adam Grossman has a very bright future as a director," said Gross, who is best remembered as the father of Michael J. Fox on *FAMILY TIES*. "Every actor, every artist, every writer of any sort has to be able to look at what they've done and say, 'Ah, that's not working, I'll erase it!' Adam can do that, and we did that many times with the filming right up until the moment we shot. I warned him when he hired me. I said, 'I will challenge you up to the very moment the camera rolls.' It is forever, when it's on film. And, Adam understands that." □

King fan per se, nor have I ever done anything quite like this," explained Gross, who enjoyed talking about Miles Davis and jazz with Grossman between takes. "I have done other science-fiction projects. I've even fought the old fashioned brand of monsters but I've never gone into this kind of demons and devils sort of stuff. And I thought it would be fun. I found this man's journey interesting. Ultimately the lesson for me is, if you don't deal with your past, it starts to deal with you. That's true on the most basic of psychological levels."

Ultimately, director Adam Grossman's biggest task on this production was to look for ways to make this little Stephen King tale believable on a budget of \$3 million. Being a recent graduate from the USC film school proved to be an asset. "Well, I love Stephen King," admitted Grossman, who lists his favorite genre films as *THE SHINING*, *JACOB'S LADDER*, *ROSEMARY'S BABY* and *THE EXORCIST*. "I think he's a wonderful storyteller. When I read the short story, I felt like this could be a really creepy movie. And the thing I like so much about the way Stephen King tells a story is that he makes it real first, before he wrecks it. To me that's what a good horror movie is about. I think that any good horror movie is about disrupting what we think is safe, which means ruining the comfort zone. Well in order to do that really horrifically, you have to create a really good comfort zone in the first place.

"When [producer] Michael [Melter] brought me on to this project, the first thing we decided was that with a movie like this you can head in the direction of *THE NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD* or you can take a more realistic approach, more like *CARRIE*. What we decided we wanted to do was the latter. That's the kind of horror film that appeals to me and I said to him, 'You know what? I want to do smaller—better. I know we don't have a lot of money. So in that case, let's not try to swallow the whole world.

Let's pick things that we can make really good. If it's not going to look great, let's do something else, if we can. You know, we're filmmakers, we can write something else, we can shoot it a different way."

King has often stated in his books, lectures and interviews that the monster standing on the other side of the closed door has always been more horrifying than when it actually makes its entrance. Grossman went on to mirror this King philosophy when he stated, "I also believe that a lot of the horror, that I love, is what you put in the audience's imagination. It's not so much about all this blood going across the screen. I mean that's a kind of a big who cares, that gets funny after awhile. If you set something up in the audience's mind, what each person in that audience imagines is so much more horrific than anything you put on the screen. Even if you have all the money in the world.

"When I start feeling like I can enjoy the movie without the monsters in it, then I feel good about it. I feel like, okay, we're doing something right here. Then when you add the monsters, well, that's what a horror movie is all about."

Working with the director and the special effects crew Meltzer admitted that marrying the effects to the story in a seamless fashion is always a challenge. And coming up with something that is new, visually interesting and within the budget is even more difficult.

"[Horror films] are tough to make because I think we've seen all the special effects and we've become numb to all the blood," explained Meltzer, a former Touche Ross CPA who began his new career in Hollywood as a mailroom clerk. "So, it's hard to try and do something different. I know when I talk to makeup effects artists, we're always discussing how to do something different, that hasn't been seen, to try and elevate it, make it classy.

"All of our effects are being done by Vision Crew, a young group of guys coming out of Boss Films. They just formed a company and they're doing all

"There's a conscious effort to be respectful to Stephen King," said producer Michael Meltzer. "We're just trying to broaden it. It's still about being haunted."



Reno (Alexis Arquette) holds captive Michelle Porter (Hilary Swank). The Trimark release later this year is based on a King story from *Cavelier*.

of the makeup effects, optical effects, practical special effects and a little digital stuff that's in the film. It's their first film as a team."

Filming was done in just under 30 days, six days a week and 14 hours a day. The production was shot almost entirely on location in the Greater Los Angeles Area at two separate homes, a national park, a high school, a diner and the famous Bronson Tunnel, where most of the big effects took place.

Although there weren't any major problems during the production, there were a few incidents that had to be dealt with during the almost two weeks of filming at the Porter House. "The most horrendous thing we've had has been a neighbor disturbing us during the takes, demanding that he be paid off to be quiet," admitted Meltzer, about the problems of filming in a seemingly quiet neighborhood in the Pasadena area of Los Angeles.

Filming inside the cramped, stuffy little rooms and hall-

ways of the old Victorian home, which many say is still haunted by an 18-year-old girl who died there in the 1920s, was complicated even more by all the film equipment and hot lights. Chris Baffa, the director of photography, likened it to a time when he had done some filming inside a nuclear submarine. He felt this was worse.

Gross, on the other hand, felt it was very nice working in the house because it was cozy and kept cool by huge shade trees and a wraparound porch that almost encircled the entire structure. Of course, you have to take into consideration that Gross had just come off the filming of the *TREMORS* sequel *AFTERSHOCKS*, which was filmed in the desert during an unseasonable heat wave.

But, for Grossman, the biggest problem came when almost an entire day's worth of film was ruined. For some strange reason the film developed a white streak in the middle of each print and had to be reshot. "It was a test for everybody but especially for me as

the director," admitted Grossman. "I was thinking about so many things at once: the performances, the camera angles, the blocking of the shot, am I getting it all and do I have enough time to do all of this. Then all of a sudden we hear, 'Oh, by the way, all that work that you did on Saturday has to be reshot.' The test was not to get upset but wait and see what was the problem and don't react to what if, what if, what if."

About two years ago, during an ABC press conference, a bearded King addressed a somewhat different kind of what if. Referring to the what ifs of allowing others to make movies from his writings, he said that he's learned to let go and let the chips fall where they may. "Well, if you try to control it completely, you go nuts," admitted King. "You go mad. You have to start with the idea that things are going to change if you let it out of your own backyard. Same way your kids are going to change when you send them off to school. They meet other kids, you know. And the kid you sent off to school, when he comes back, he isn't the same."

And, sometimes, I guess it can be said about the films that are adapted from King's stories, they come back...again. And...again. And...again. □

In a battle of Tarot cards with the demon, Jules (Jennifer Elise Cox), a psychic, gets dealt a losing hand.



Hunchback of Notre Dame

Disney gives song to Victor Hugo in the grand style of "Phantom of the Opera."

By Dan Scapperotti

At first blush Victor Hugo's classic novel, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, would seem an odd choice for an animated feature film. But, in the hands of the Disney Studio and its talented artists it may well be a major addition to the Disney canon. On a roll since the smash hit release of *THE LITTLE MERMAID*, the studio that has dominated the animation field for almost 60 years has carved out a full plate of cartoon features. Strangely, Quasimodo, the physically challenged bell ringer of the great cathedral, wasn't even the main character in the 1831 novel. The creature's prominence is mainly the result of the several film adaptations which have graced the screen since the silents. Disney's version opens nationwide June 12.

Hugo's Quasimodo is a dreadful creature who, as a baby, had been abandoned outside the gates of Notre Dame. Found and raised by Claude Frollo, Quasimodo is slavishly loyal to the archdeacon. When Frollo becomes dangerously infatuated with Esmeralda, the young Gypsy dancing girl, Quasimodo willingly assists his mentor in an attempt to kidnap the beautiful woman. The attack, however, is foiled by Phoebus, the handsome Captain of the Guards. Later, when Quasimodo gets the courage to leave the safe haven of his bell tower, he meets Esmeralda. Her kindness sparks a new emotion in the deformed creature—love. His fantasy is quickly shattered when he discovers that she and Phoebus are lovers.

Faced with the novel's story of betrayed love, a cowardly hero and a tragic ending, the Studio has understandably made some



Producer Don Hahn (seated) before macquettes of the singing gargoyles, flanked by directors Gary Trousdale (l) and Kirk Wise (r), bringing Victor Hugo's classic to animated life.

major changes to the plot. Don't expect to see the high body count of the novel, nor its grim ending.

Don Hahn, a 20-year Disney veteran who had produced the successful *THE LION KING*, was tapped for similar duties on *THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME*. For Hahn his most daunting challenge on the project was "translating a great piece of literature like Hugo's novel into an animated film. And it's a musical no less. This was the biggest challenge over all in terms of

storytelling. We're really lucky that Kirk Wise and Gary Trousdale, the directors, have backgrounds in stories."

The directors saw the author's themes as a series of contrasts such as privileged characters opposed to outcasts like the gypsies and most dramatically, Quasimodo. "They played all these themes that are in Hugo's novel," said Hahn, "without trying to literally recreate the piece word for word. That interpretation and that transition from book to screen was probably the most difficult thing to do."

No Disney animated feature would be complete without the traditional comedic elements. Here they are represented by a trio of living gargoyles who hop around on their pedestals. While the point may be lost on contemporary audiences more at home watching MTV than reading the classics, the three gargoyles are named Victor, Hugo and Lavern. Will Finn, the head of story on the film as well as the man who animated Lavern, explained that in the original script there were only two gargoyles, Boris and Bela, an obvious tribute to the two great stars of horror films. Mary Wickes provides the voice of the grandmotherly Lavern. Charles Kimbrough plays Victor and Jason Alexander, the bespectacled loser, George, on *SEINFELD*, breathes life into Hugo, described as "the Belushiesque gargoyle."

Selecting the appropriate voices for these characters was another challenge facing Wise and Trousdale. Fortunately, they were given free rein to ask for anyone who fit the bill. "We were involved from day one with casting," said Wise, "and deciding what types of characters exist in this world and what types of actors suggest themselves.



Quasimodo, voiced by Tom Hulce, is crowned the "King of Fools" in the square before Notre Dame.

Very early on when we had our list of characters and early drawings of the characters, we'd just sit in a room and talk. Esmeralda is this type of a character and Phoebus is this type of character. Usually you start with your kind of pie-in-the-sky casting ideas. You decide Esmeralda is a Demi Moore type. So you put down Demi Moore at the top of the list thinking we'll never get her, but she's a Demi Moore type."

The directors started auditioning voice talents from Broadway and were ready to make cast selections when, to their surprise and joy, Jeffrey Katzenberg told them that if they wanted Demi Moore, get Demi Moore!

Consequently, the main voice talents for the animated characters were provided by a first rate cast including Tom Hulce as the tragic Quasimodo. Hulce appeared in MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN and was nominated for an Oscar for his portrayal of Mozart in AMADEUS. Demi Moore, who has had her share of genre roles in such films as THE SEVENTH SIGN, GHOST and NOTHING BUT TROUBLE, plays the voluptuous gypsy, Esmeralda. Tony Jay gives voice to the wily Archdeacon, Frolo. The versatile Kevin Kline, who is the voice of Phoebus, is equally adept at Shakespeare or comedy.

Three separate animation units worked to finish the feature in time for its June release. It seems only fitting that besides the main animation unit, housed in the magnificent new animation building across the street from the main studio in Burbank, and the Florida studio, a staff of 150 artists are at work in Disney's new French studio. The European division will provide about 10-15

minutes of footage for the film. They will deliver a five-minute song sequence, "The Bells of Notre Dame," which opens the film, as well as a couple of sequences for the picture's climax.

Disney traditionally uses two directors on each of its animated films. "These films are so big with so many people," explained Don Hahn, "that the direction works better as a two-headed monster. The two directors collaborate with each other and knock ideas around. Kirk's forte is animation, so he can work specifically with the animators. While Gary works with special effects and layout. They both work together with color."

The story's massive crowd scenes required some technological tampering with the animation process. According to Hahn, each successive animated feature tries to push the technological envelope further. "What Kirk and Gary wanted to do," said Hahn, "was to create these big, epic scale street scenes of medieval Paris much like Hugo was able to articulate in the novel."

To do this they turned to Kirin Joshi, the CGI Supervisor. Joshi and his team managed to adapt the programs used to create the fabulous wildebeest stampede in THE LION KING. "That enabled us to get these massive crowd scenes," Hahn explained, "so we have the kind of big BEN HUR epic crowds cheering out in the square. For years traditional animation would have done that with the help of held cels; so you would have kind of a held crowd. If you go back and look at SLEEPING BEAUTY and CINDERELLA you see these big ballroom shots with everyone quietly paying attention. That's because it was really impossible

“Translating a great piece of literature like Hugo’s novel into an animated film was the biggest challenge, a musical, no less.”

—Producer Dan Hahn—

to animate a huge crowd like this.”

The music and songs are an integral part of any Disney animated feature and HUNCHBACK has the best in the business. Alan Menken, who has won Oscars for his scores on BEAUTY AND THE BEAST, THE LITTLE MERMAID and ALADDIN, has composed the music for the film. Stephen Schwartz, who was the lyricist on POCAHONTAS, wrote the lyrics for the new film. HUNCHBACK boasts a host of new songs including "The Bells of Notre Dame," Quasimodo's lament "Out There," "A Guy Like You," the gargoyles tribute to their friend, Quasimodo, "Topsy Turvy," "Heaven's Light/Hell's Fire," Quasimodo and Frolo singing their tributes to Esmeralda, one seeing the young Gypsy as an angel and the other singing a dangerously possessive dirge, "The Court of Miracles" and "God Help the Outcast."

With a classic story, a mammoth historical backdrop, a top-flight cast, major musical talents and the best animators in the business, Disney's HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME has the potential of being a spectacular film achievement. □

Supervising animator James Baxter sketches Quasimodo. Disney opens their gothic musical extravaganza nationwide this summer on June 12.



JAMES & THE GIANT PEACH

Puppet film auteur Henry Selick brings Roald Dahl's exquisite fantasy to life.



Selick directs the live-action opening with a giant peach fabricated out of bed foam, recreating the puppet magic of *THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS*.

By Lawrence French

"There have always been two kinds of cinema, the commercial and the artistic. There are always some men who will try to express their inner world, to convey it to others through the medium of the film, which is above all a marvelous tool for artistic creation. At the same time, films are made to please the culturally inferior masses, who are so either for social or economic reasons. Thus, such films are apt to be superficial, stereotyped, easy to understand, and usually kowtow to the morals and politics of the different governments. This could be a good definition of the commercial film."

—Luis Bunuel
Surrealist film director & entomologist

Roald Dahl, the wry British author of many grim and macabre short stories, clearly had an inner world in mind when he published *James and the Giant Peach* in 1961. Some 35 years later, Walt Disney Pictures is taking an adventurous risk, by allowing maverick director Henry Selick the chance to bring his own artistic vision to Dahl's weird and wonderful story. Selick's film opens nationwide April 12.

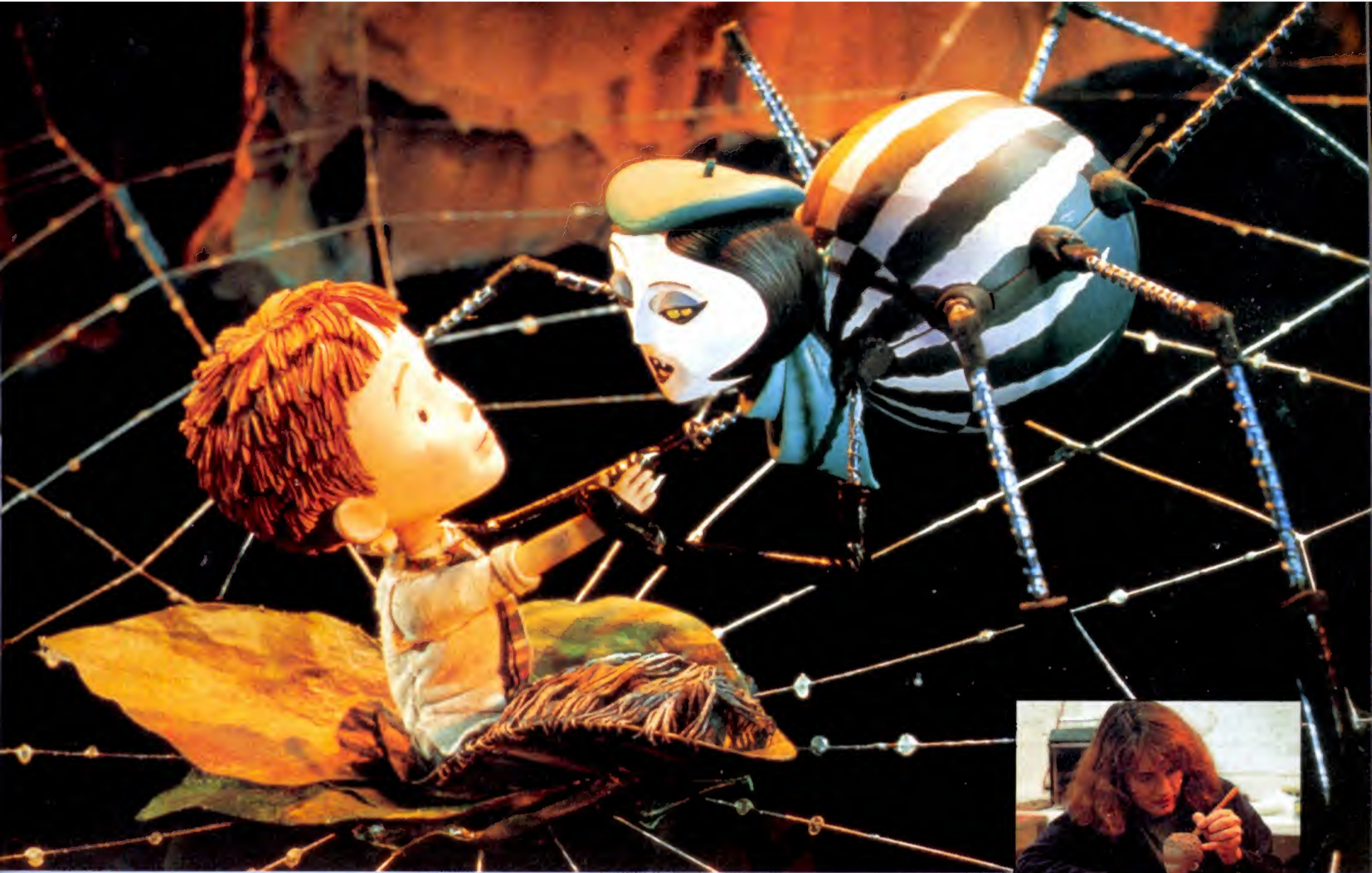
Although *James and the Giant Peach* is a children's book, it has a distinctly off-beat

storyline. It deals with a nine-year-old's adventures, not with such usual Disney fare as a dog or a horse, but with a group of giant-sized insects. Combine that with Dahl's iconoclastic undertone, and you hardly have a story with universal audience appeal. No wonder Disney's chief executive, Michael Eisner, had serious doubts about making the movie. However, the book's enduring success, as well as its obvious compatibility with stop-motion animation, overcame the initial misgivings at the Mouse House.

Like *THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS*, Selick's previous stop-motion extravaganza, there were attempts to get *JAMES AND*

Creating wonders frame by frame.





Miss Spider to the rescue: James is helped out of a tight spot by an arachnid based on Diana Rigg in *THE AVENGERS*, voiced by Susan Sarandon. Inset: Sculptor Shelley Daniels prepares a clay design prototype of James' puppet likeness.



THE GIANT PEACH made as a possible film at Disney back in the early '80s. Disney storyboard artist, Joe Ranft, had tried to get people at the studio interested, but it would have been a costly and complicated proposition, and there was no strong advocate to pursue the book rights. Ranft introduced Selick to the book's charms while they were both toiling on projects at

the artistically stagnant, pre-Eisner Disney.

"I had always loved *James and the Giant Peach*," said Ranft, "ever since it was first read to me in my third grade class. It was such a liberating story, with really wild imagination. But Disney couldn't see it as a film. At the time, they were doing movies like *THE FOX AND THE HOUND* and *THE*

SMALL ONE, while we were all inspired by recent science fiction movies like *ALIEN* and *STAR WARS*. We thought, 'Why do we have to work on stupid movies, with characters like Widow Tweed?' We wanted to do more exciting projects."

When Henry Selick initially read the book, he thought it was wonderful as well, but realized it would be a difficult task to

turn it into a workable screenplay. "A lot of people I knew were interested in the book," said Selick, "but it's very episodic and disconnected. It's got a very dream-like quality. At that time it was just too weird for Disney, and Joe told me he didn't think it would ever get made there. Dahl's books were considered too subversive, and they had even been banned

James watches as gulls bring the net to make his giant peach airborne. Right: Animator Mike Belzer positions James, gulls, Centipede and Grasshopper.



JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH

ROALD DAHL

James' British master of fantasy—a filmography.

By Lawrence French

Roald (pronounced Roo-aal) Dahl published his first short story at the behest of C.S. Forester in *The Saturday Evening Post*, and was quickly acclaimed as an author in the vein of John Collier, Saki and O Henry. The stories contained in his two superb collections of macabre tales, *Someone Like You* and *Kiss Kiss* were written mostly during the '50s. Dahl's subsequent work was primarily as a children's author, including such titles as *The Fantastic Mr. Fox*, *BFG* (The Big Friendly Giant), *Danny: The Champion of the World* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Dahl married actress Patricia Neal in 1953

Dahl published *James and the Giant Peach* in 1961, a kid's book that has delighted audiences of all ages.

JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH
by ROALD DAHL



and helped her overcome the effects of a debilitating stroke in 1965 (which was the subject of a TV movie with Glenda Jackson and Dirk Bogarde). Dahl died in 1990 of leukemia.

Besides Disney's *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH* and Danny DeVito's *MATILDA*—due this July—Dahl's filmography includes:

● **THE GREMLINS** (1943) Walt Disney: Dahl's first children's story is centered around an RAF pilot named Gus, who is recovering from a crash caused by Gremlins, and devises a plan to train the naughty little creatures to help English pilots during the battle of Britain. Although the project never got off the ground, Disney used the story as the basis for a picture book and other merchandising tie-ins, including Gremlin dolls, which helped popularize the Gremlin mythos during WWII.

● **ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS** (1958) TV series: Dahl's short stories featured the kind of droll, black humor, suspense and surprise twist endings which undoubtedly delighted Hitchcock. Of the six Dahl stories used for *HITCHCOCK PRESENTS*, four were actually directed by Hitchcock himself. The most famous, *LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER*, featured Barbara Bel Geddes as a housewife who bludgeons her husband (a police detective) to death with a frozen leg of lamb, and then calmly places the incriminating evidence in the oven. During the subsequent in-



Miss Spider checks the compass after James and his companions land in the Arctic. Dahl's estate insured that Disney's adaptation would be a faithful one.

vestigation, she solicitously offers the policemen some lamb for dinner. In an ending that foreshadows *PSYCHO*, Hitchcock dollies up to Bel Geddes face, grinning dementedly, as one of the policemen comments, "I'll bet the murder weapon is right under our noses."

Other Dahl stories directed by Hitchcock include "Poison," "Dip in the Pool," and "Mrs. Bixby & the Colonel's Coat," (all made in 1958).

● **WAY OUT** (1961) TV series: Dahl hosted this short-lived CBS series, as well as scripting the pilot episode. Many episodes featured the makeup effects of maestro Dick Smith.

● **YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE** (1966) UA—Lewis Gilbert: Dahl knew and admired Bond creator Ian Fleming, and according to Dahl's wife, actress Patricia Neal, Fleming gave Dahl the idea for his story, "Lamb To The Slaughter" over dinner one evening. Dahl jettisoned most of Fleming's storyline of *YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE*, and created an entirely new plot, that featured *SPECTRE* master criminal Ernst Stavro Blofeld hijacking U.S. and Russian spacecraft in an attempt to start World War III. Dahl told Lisa Tuttle, "I liked [YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE]. Lewis Gilbert was a nice director, and they followed the script. It was lovely."

● **CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG** (1968) UA—Ken Hughes: Bond producer Albert Broccoli asked Dahl to adapt Ian

Fleming's children's story, about an inventor (Dick Van Dyke) who tells his children a fairy tale concerning the magical properties of their racing car and the mythical kingdom of Vulgaria. Director Ken Hughes told the *New York Times* he had to rewrite the entire script and Broccoli brought in Bond adapter Richard Maibaum to rewrite the Hughes script as shooting was underway. The first third of the story would seem to belong to Dahl, as it is set in a candy factory (with a simply scrumptious set by Ken Adam), and has more coherence than the unwieldy finale, which mirrored the tenor of the late '60s, by having the children and villagers partake in a revolution that overthrows the iron rule of the Vulgarian leaders. Needless to say, Dahl was not pleased with the results, nor were most critics.

● **WILLY WONKA & THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY** (1970) WB—Mel Stuart: Dahl was bitterly disappointed with the first of his children's books to reach the screen. The script Dahl wrote was substantially rewritten by David Seltzer (*THE OMEN*), including a changed ending that was particularly galling to Dahl. Gene Wilder provides little of the charisma needed as Willy Wonka, the owner of the chocolate factory, and the garishly overdone sets, combined with Mel Stuart's pedestrian direction, make the whole movie an exercise in boredom.

● **THE NIGHT DIGGER**

ROALD DAHL & HOLLYWOOD

“Roald Dahl hadn’t been very happy with the projects of his that had been made into movies,” said director Henry Selick. “He was reticent about letting things go.”



Off on a magical voyage to New York, James hoists a mug with the Worm. Inset: David Vogel, president of production at Walt Disney Pictures, who championed the off-beat project at the studio.



(1971) MGM—Alastair Reid. Subtitled, “A Tale of the Strange and the Perverse,” Dahl conceived the film as a vehicle for his wife, Patricia Neal, who was recovering from her near-fatal stroke. She plays a lonely woman living in a crumbling Gothic mansion, along with her blind and demanding Mother. Into their insular world comes a charismatic young stranger (Nicholas Clay), whom Neal hires as a handyman, only to become enamored with him. Later, she begins to have suspicions about his nocturnal habits, which include raping and killing young girls and burying them in motorways undergoing re-paving. Of special note is the haunting score by Bernard Herrmann, although Herrmann initially objected to the film’s ending and wanted to cut some of Dahl’s dialogue to highlight his music.

• **THE WITCHES (1990)** WB—Nicolas Roeg: This last film to be made before Dahl’s death, was far better than previous efforts, but Dahl still didn’t care for the several alterations made from his book. Angelica Huston plays the Grand High Witch of England, who plans to turn all the children of the world into mice. The plans are discovered by a little boy and his grandmother who attempt to thwart Huston’s scheme. Jim Henson’s Muppet Shop provided some marvelous mice and makeup effects. □

Grateful acknowledgement to Alan Warren and Jeremy Treglown for information derived from their books on Roald Dahl.

The late Roald Dahl in 1988, one of the world’s most popular and best-selling authors of children’s books.



in some places, in the early days. So after Joe had planted the seed in my mind, it stayed with me through the years. Then, when I was in the middle of making *THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS*, I wanted to get another project lined up, in order to keep the studio [in San Francisco] together. Putting this stop-motion facility together was actually as difficult as making the film itself, and I didn’t want to have it all fall apart, just because we didn’t have another film to make.”

Selick proposed several projects to follow *NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS*, but not to the executives at Disney. Instead Selick went to Tim Burton and Denise DiNovi, who had produced *NIGHTMARE*. “At the time, Disney was gung-ho with Tim,” said Selick, “and they were trying to do an overall deal with him. Frankly, I went to Tim because I wanted his protection, so I might have a little more creative freedom. Then, when Tim showed an interest in the book, through me, Disney

thought, ‘Maybe we can make this work,’ and began pursuing the book rights.”

Roald Dahl died in 1990. His widow and the executor of his estate, Felicity (Liccie) Dahl, began entertaining offers for the rights to *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH* around that time. Among the interested parties were Steven Spielberg’s Amblin Entertainment, and Danny DeVito (who has since turned Dahl’s *MATILDA* into a live-action film). “Liccie Dahl was very much involved in Roald’s legacy,” noted Selick. “He hadn’t been very happy with the handful of projects of his that had been made into movies, so he was always reticent about letting things go. Liccie wanted to keep an active hand in any future projects, so we wanted to get her interested. While we were making *NIGHTMARE*, she came through the studio and met a lot of people here, saw some footage of what we were doing, and she felt this would be a good way to make *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH*. Rick Heinrichs even did a sculpture of the Grasshopper, which we sent to Liccie as a gift, and she responded very

strongly to that.”

With Felicity Dahl interested in the possibilities of doing the film in stop motion, Disney reportedly plunked down \$2 million to take the book off the market, and acquired merchandising rights to the book’s menagerie of talking insects. “Tim Burton had used his clout with Disney to get them to purchase the rights,” said producer Brian Rosen. “Then he gave it to Henry to do, as a way of thanking him for making *THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS*.”

While Selick agreed that Tim Burton helped make the deal happen at Disney, he is disappointed Burton didn’t lend any moral support during the inevitable creative battles it was going to take to get such an off-beat movie made. “Tim helped set up the film, and after that he had nothing more to do with it,” said Selick. “He took a huge amount of money, and then gave me no protection. I

don’t think he’s even read the script. Tim’s not the reading kind of guy. He usually watches some old Mexican horror films, or *CURSE OF THE BIGFOOT* and gets inspired by that. It was really Denise DiNovi who stayed involved with the project, while Tim doesn’t have the interest to do films like this. It’s a little too sweet for him.”

Selick’s first creative skirmish began over whether the entire movie should be made in stop motion, or be bookended by sequences done in live action. Selick had always wanted to make it with a combination of the two techniques, but the studio had resisted the idea. After all, *THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS* was a success as a total stop-motion film. Why change a winning formula?

“I originally wanted to start with live action, and have James remain as a real boy throughout the movie,” noted Selick, but the studio declined, fearing the expense. “I didn’t want to give up entirely, so I thought of starting with live action and having the boy transform into a puppet. It’s almost like the opposite of *PINOCCHIO*. We don’t make a

story point that James thinks of himself as a puppet, it's just a dream world he goes into, like *THE WIZARD OF OZ*, where the color is more intense, and it's more imaginative than the world he leaves behind. The minute you do stop motion, I think it's magic, so I felt why not save the magic for when James goes into the peach. Then you have an automatic jolt of magic that makes for a nice segue into the dreamworld.

"I also wanted to do something a little different, and didn't want to repeat myself. It was a tough sell to get Disney to agree to it, but I got Lizzie Dahl



PRAISING POTTER'S PEACH
"Dennis Potter did a great first draft," said Selick, "but he took it a little too far away from the book, for both Disney and the Dahl estate, setting it during WW II."



Paul Terry as James, sequestered with his horrid aunts and pining for his father. Left: Joanna Lumley and Miriam Margolyes as Spiker and Sponge.

on my side, and in theory it would be less expensive, which always helps."

With the project now in development, Disney allowed Selick the opportunity to pick his preferred scenarist for the difficult task of adapting the book. Dennis Potter, the British TV dramatist, (*THE SINGING DETECTIVE*, *FOLLOW THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD*, *PENNIES FROM HEAVEN*), was Selick's first choice.

"Dennis did a great first draft," recalled Selick, "but he took it a little too far away from the book, for both Disney and the Dahl estate. He inserted a little too much of his own interests into it. He set it specifically during World War II, and had James being orphaned by the blitzkrieg of London. He made James' father an RAF [Royal Air Force] pilot who was shot down in enemy territory, and at the end of the film he had his father reappear [and become the mayor of New York]. It was visually very dark, but it was funny, because having the father

come back is usually the kind of ending that Disney would find more appealing. But the Dahl estate, which had script approval, said, 'No! The parents die in the book, and they're going to stay dead.'"

Dennis Potter died in June of 1994, and with both Felicity Dahl and the studio executives unhappy with the dark tone of his approach, it was evident a fresh start was needed. "We went to Jonathan Roberts next," said Selick, "who co-wrote *THE LION KING*. He and I locked ourselves in a room for three months, and hammered

out a new script. Jonathan wrote it, and I was there for story contributions. Nobody loved it, but it got us over the next hurdle, and inspired Disney to take another crack at it."

It was at this point the project nearly got shipwrecked by Disney's chairman, Michael Eisner. He saw the revised script and reportedly said, "Who wants to see a film about a boy and a bunch of bugs? We can't spend \$30 million on this!" Luckily, David Vogel, the head of production at Disney, saw the merits of the project, and leaped into the fray, point-

ing out to Eisner that the book was one of the most checked-out library books in the country, and it was still on the *New York Times* bestseller list (of children's books), after having been around for 32 years.

Vogel then hired two writers to work on scripts concurrently. Karey Kirkpatrick, who had worked on *THE RESCUERS DOWN UNDER*, did one version, and Bruce Joel Rubin, who wrote *GHOST*, did another. Vogel had been impressed by Kirkpatrick's previous screenplay for the direct-to-video sequel, *HONEY, WE SHRUNK OURSELVES* (due in video stores this July). "I tried to drive home some of the emotions of the story, so it wasn't [as Eisner had duly noted], just a story about a boy and some bugs," said Kirkpatrick.

When the two scripts came in, Selick favored Kirkpatrick's version, since it remained closest to the Dahl book. "I was very pleased," said Selick, "because Karey's version reflected what Jonathan Roberts and I had spent many months working on. He added a lot of heart and character interplay to the story. Rubin's version went off in a different direction, where he made the whole journey into a dream, and at the end James was back at home. Bruce had done a good script, but it was just too far away from the book. Lizzie Dahl thought Karey's script was better as well, and we found ourselves allied at last."

Before he wrote his script, Kirkpatrick met with Selick, Jonathan Roberts, and Kelly Asbury, the head of the storyboard department for three days of animated discussions. "That

Josephine Huang animates on different scale peach sets and characters. Crews filmed on 26 separate stages simultaneously to meet the film's April 12 release date, with peaches varying in size, up to six feet in diameter.



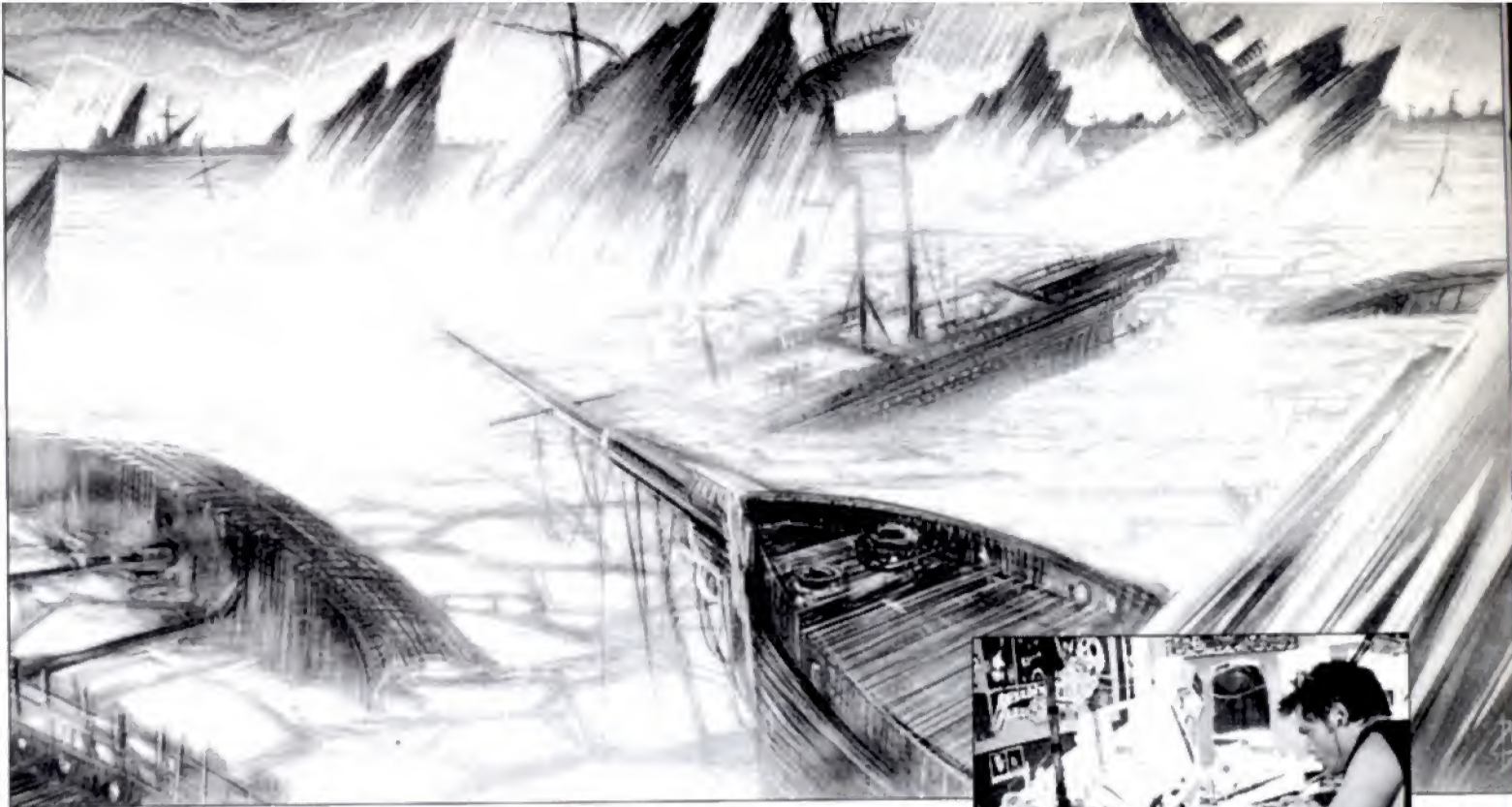
was kind of odd," noted Kirkpatrick, "because I would be re-writing Jonathan's script, and the previous writer doesn't usually sit in the same room with the new writer. But this wasn't a case where we were throwing out Jonathan's previous work. We were keeping a lot of what he'd done intact, and we both had worked on animated movies before, and been members of a story team. So we all sat around a table and talked about the characters, and their psychology."

One of the story concepts that was agreed on was the need to keep the villainous aunts, Spiker and Sponge, alive till the end of the story, in order to give it a more dramatic resolution. "I even spoke to a representative of the Dahl estate," said Kirkpatrick, "who knew Roald Dahl, and he said if Dahl had been writing the screenplay, he would never have killed off the aunts as early as he did in the book."

Kirkpatrick's new script helped the project get back on track, with David Vogel pushing hard to keep the momentum going. "Karey's script added a lot of heart to the story, as well as character interplay, and got us to the next step," said Selick, "which was to start storyboarding the sequences."

"In live action you have a script, which is your blueprint to go make the movie," explained producer Brian Rosen. "In animation, the script is the basis to make the storyboards. That's where a lot of things get added and changed, and it's really where the story gets all worked out." To head up the story department, Kelly Asbury, who had worked on NIGHTMARE, returned, and began working on many of the live-action sequences, and was soon joined by Joe Ranft, once he was free of his previous commitment to TOY STORY.

"David Vogel deserves a hand for really pushing us," said Selick about the Disney exec who championed the project. "He had a sense of problem areas. He made us go back again to make the sequences stronger and funnier. It gets frustrating, but you really have to hammer it out in the storyboards, because you don't get to do multi-



Misdirected to the Arctic, James and the Peach encounter a graveyard of lost vessels, design by art director Bill Boes (inset). Below: Filming on the huge Arctic set, measuring 35 by 40 feet, complete with painted cyclorama backing.



ple takes, or coverage in animation."

Another sequence that got carefully worked out in storyboard form was James' transformation into a stop-motion puppet. "It could easily prove to be a bit arbitrary," noted Ranft. "The problem was, how were we going to get James to change into a puppet, and have the audience relate to him as the same character. It's a tricky transition. What we did was have James eat a piece of peach that contains a magic green crocodile tongue. He finds these magic green things that he had earlier spilled at the base of the peach tree. They make the peach grow, and as a little hook for the audience, we have him eat one, so people will think, 'Oh, that's how he turns into a puppet.'"

Like ALICE IN WONDERLAND, this seemingly innocent story point might be interpreted as James unintentionally ingesting a form of hallucinogenic drug. It's a theory Joe Ranft doesn't deny. "There's truly a psychedelic undertone to it," said Ranft. "We have a lot of surreal images, and I think it's a true San Francisco film. Working at Disney I'd hear people say things like, 'Walt Disney must have taken drugs when he did FANTASIA,' but you can't do animation when you're high on drugs. It takes all your faculties to be doing this kind of work."

During the early scripting stages, Henry Selick invited a noted children's book illustra-



tor, Lane Smith, to work on the conceptual design of the film, and to specifically create the look for the six major insect characters. "I had initially talked to Lane about working on THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS," said Selick, "but that was before I realized that Tim was so adamant about having it look so specifically like his world."

Smith began by doing sketches of the insect characters, which included a sultry Spider (voiced by Susan Sarandon), a cowardly Earthworm (David Thewlis), a maternal Ladybug (Jane Leeves), a very dignified old green Grasshopper (Simon Callow), a matronly Glowworm (Miriam Margolyes), and a brash and brazen Centipede from Brooklyn (Richard Dreyfuss). Smith also made 20 oil paintings, taken from key dramatic moments in the screenplay.

"They were inspirational paintings," said Smith, "to give the animators and other people

something to look at, and give them a sort of feel for what the film would look like. In this case, Harley Jessup, the production designer, had such a strong vision himself, I don't know how helpful they were. I think Disney just wanted those paintings, so they could auction them off and make some money," joked Smith.

Being a children's book illustrator, Smith was naturally familiar with Roald Dahl's book, and reread it again, making character sketches of the various insects in the margins. "Then when I saw the script," said Smith, "there were certain changes that had been made from the book. The Centipede, for instance, walked on his legs in the book, but for the movie, his legs became arms, so now he walks upright, and instead of having shoes on every appendage, we gave him gloves. By making him an upright character, he could be a lot more cocky, and the animators could get a lot of gestures out of him."

The other funny thing was, if I gave the Centipede 42 legs, like he had in the book, I could just see the animators fainting. Not only would that be hard to animate, it would be hard on the eyes, to have all these limbs moving around all the time. So we ended up giving him ten arms, and two legs."

Even so, that would be a big challenge for the animators, because they're used to animating characters with only two arms, and two legs. On JAMES, four major characters would have six, eight or ten legs, because they're bugs. Smith laughed and said, "I didn't care, though, because I wasn't going to be doing it."

As far as the aesthetics of character design went, there was hardly any compromising, since Smith and Selick were on exactly the same wavelength. "I would do maybe nine or ten variations on each bug," said Smith, "and usually the one I liked the best was the one that Henry liked too."

Most of the character designs were cemented fairly quickly, although Miss Spider caused Smith some problems. "I kept coming up with designs that were too freaky or else too anthropomorphized," admitted Smith. "They wanted the Spider to be a sort of sexy character, so I was a little stumped. I thought, 'How do you make a Spider

Henry's villainous aunts Spiker and Sponge pop up again as the masthead of an underwater ship comes to life.



TIM BURTON, TASKMASTER

"For some people making movies is like going to war," said Selick of Burton. "James Cameron is really brutal and tough on people and Tim's of that same school, no worse."



Miss Spider, a design cracked by art director Kendal Cronkhite, who gave her an air of mystery and resemblance to Diana Rigg. Inset: Character fabricator Christine Lashaw, painting faces.



sexy?' In the end the Spider became a real collaboration between Henry and art directors Harley Jessup and Kendal Cronkhite. I think we started to get it when Kendal did some drawings making her mysterious, and a bit like Diana Rigg in THE AVENGERS."

Unlike Miss Spider, the Centipede was a design that came into being almost immediately. "I think he's very close to the very first sketches Lane did," said Selick. "In the book, all the bugs are British, but it was Karey's idea to make the Centipede a brash American, which adds more texture and vocal contrast when he's thrown in with all these mannered Brits."

Smith likened the Centipede to Popeye, the sailor man. Laughed Smith, "I'm sure a fine artist would think in terms of, 'I'll add a little bit of Paul Klee, mixed in with some Henri Rousseau, and a dab of Marc Chagall.' On the other hand, I'd be thinking, 'Nah, it's kind of like Popeye, with a little bit of the Hydra from JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS.'" Like Popeye, the Centipede claims to be an experienced sailor, which proves to be mere hyperbole,

when he navigates the peach to the Arctic Ocean.

The Earthworm was to be the gloomy pessimist of the group who sees the bad side of every situation, and like a real Earthworm, is blind. Noted Smith, "Because he's blind, I think Henry thought, 'Why don't we give him sunglasses, so we can actually animate the glasses for expression.' I found that much more inviting to look at, than a character like Keye Luke in KUNG FU, with these white eyeballs staring out into space."

The elder statesman of the insects is the Grasshopper, whom Smith envisioned as a Sherlock Holmes type of character. "He seems to be the smartest of the bugs," said Smith, "and he plays the violin, so I was sort of thinking of Jeremy Brett when I drew him."

The Ladybug is the maternal figure of the group, and misses her many children, who have long since flown off into the world. "She's very protective of James," said Selick, "and she's full of love and strength. There's a scene where the peach is being attacked by a shark, and the Ladybug rescues every-

one. We haven't seen her fly yet, and she suddenly comes flying out of the hold of the peach, literally flying to the rescue, and bashes the shark with her handbag. She's really a heroic character."

The Glowworm doesn't have a large part, but was one of Smith's favorite characters to design. "She's kind of a regal older woman," noted Smith, "who might be like a woman sitting in a box seat at the opera, and she's hard of hearing. A character might say, 'We're going to eat a bit of peach,' and she'll say, 'You're going to squeeze a leach?' We gave her a lime and yellow green lightbulb in her tail. It's like the eerie glow-in-the-dark green you'd get from those model kits of the Wolf Man. That's always been one of my favorite colors. I just hope they make a Glowworm toy for the kids."

The book's seventh bug, a Silkworm, was included in early drafts of the script, but was quickly deemed expendable. "She didn't serve much function in the story," said Kirkpatrick. "I had initially included the Silkworm, but she was just this big lump in the corner. She didn't have legs so she really couldn't move."

In selecting his vocal cast Selick wanted to not only assemble the best possible actors, but also have the voices work together to create a kind of musical harmony. "You really want to have the characters as individualistic as possible," said Selick, "so their tonality, rhythm and range really separates. You want each actor's voice to be in a different register, like the instruments in an orchestra. You don't want too many oboes or trumpets."

In the case of the Centipede's Brooklyn accent, that meant going through several actors, including Bruno Kirby and Fisher Stevens, before Selick and Disney agreed that Richard Dreyfuss would bring the correct note to the proceedings. "That was a tough one," said Selick. "My natural tendencies

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JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH



STOP-MOTION GODFATHER

Tim Burton set up the movie, then cast it adrift.

By Lawrence French

Tim Burton's clout and interest in stop-motion animation helped to finance both *THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS* and *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH*. Burton's continued desire to use stop motion had the unfortunate side effect of causing a rift with *NIGHTMARE'S* director, Henry Selick. At one point Burton and Selick were going to team-up to provide a stream of stop-motion projects for the San Francisco based Skellington studio. However, when Burton began courting animators who were working on *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH* to desert for his mega-budgeted space invasion movie, *MARS ATTACKS!*, Selick was not pleased.

"Tim was pretty adamant about vacuuming up all the animators I do my work with," said Selick. "Tim's a very talented

and famous director, while I only have two films under my belt, but I'm the guy here in the trenches, working every day with the animators. I think Tim was only here about two weeks while we were doing *NIGHTMARE*. As an animator myself, I treat the animators pretty well, although I do ask an enormous amount from them. But they know I'm dedicated to them, and I think that's why a lot of them stuck around."

Tim Burton acknowledged the dedication of the animators during the making of *A NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS*, noting, "Stop-motion is a technique which can drive you insane. Working on *NIGHTMARE* was great for me, but it was not so great for the animators. It would drive Henry and the animators crazy, because it's like making a live-action movie in slow, slow-motion. For me, it was really pleasurable, because



Director Henry Selick (r) charged that Burton (l) abandoned him, then tried to steal his animators, after making *THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS*.

I'd see the shots as they came in, check them out and just sort of develop things." Burton could not be reached for comment on his split with Selick.

Further tension developed after Burton helped convince Disney to buy the rights to *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH*, but failed to shepherd it through the murky waters of the studio development process, due to his impending commitment to direct *MARS ATTACKS!* at Warner Bros. Based on the Topps bubble-gum cards first issued in 1962, *MARS ATTACKS!* stirred up a great deal of excitement among the animators at Skellington studio. Tom St. Amand was among those approached to work on the film, but regretfully declined.

"It was too bad," remarked St. Amand, "because *MARS ATTACKS!* will be like the '50's sci-fi film you always wanted to see, but they never

quite made. I think it will be a really neat movie, but I was already working for Henry, so I had to pass on the project."

MARS ATTACKS! promises to be an effects spectacular, with the wholesale destruction of Washington D.C. similar to Ray Harryhausen's *EARTH VS. THE FLYING SAUCERS*, although played with the kind of lampooning black humor that was done so splendidly in Kubrick's *DR. STRANGE-LOVE*. To build the Martian invaders, Burton set up a shop in Los Angeles and began looking for stop-motion animators in England, since most of the Skellington animators were already committed to *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH*. Burton planned to set up a full scale stop-motion studio, to handle the animation not only for *MARS ATTACKS!*, but another project *THE CORPSE BRIDE*, based on a traditional European folk story.

Strangely enough, Burton didn't approach Phil Tippett, who was already familiar with *MARS ATTACKS!*, after helping develop a script from the gory bubble-gum cards at Orion, back in 1987. "Martin Amis had written a script," revealed Tippett, "that made it into a black comedy about our consumer oriented society, and Alex Cox (*REPO MAN*) was going to direct it. Unfortunately Orion never liked the direction we took."

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After finding it difficult to crew-up his *MARS ATTACKS!* for stop motion, Burton switched to CGI effects from ILM.



JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH



VISUAL EFFECTS

CG imagery and motion control sent the peach flying and kept it afloat.

By Lawrence French

While JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH will contain less stop-motion animation than THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS, it will have a greatly expanded base of visual effects shots that will be supporting the basic core effect of puppet animation. "We have practically every kind of effect you can do," said director Henry Selick. "We're using CGI to create the ocean [as well as the seagulls, and a peach-eating shark]. There's a lot of motion-control, because we have peaches flying through the air, or floating on the water, and we wanted to make them look like they're moving, to keep things rich and interesting. We have over 300 composite shots, as well as in-camera effects and hand drawn effects, so we didn't make it easy on ourselves."

To simulate ocean waves the peach floats on, and then flies over, held aloft by hundreds of seagulls, Selick wanted something that looked like a moving illustration, or a painting, and decided after much testing to use computer graphics. "We looked at a lot of different companies, and even thought of doing it all in-house," remarked Selick. "In the end, we went with Sony Imageworks, who made some promising tests, and gave us a



Hoisting the anchor in the Arctic, an Eskimo pirate and his skeleton pal, homages to the stop-motion swordfighters of Ray Harryhausen.

good financial deal. After they did the initial test, though, it seemed like forever before it got better. It was scary for a while, because it didn't seem like it would ever get better. Then we started to have some breakthroughs, and ultimately they've done some incredible work. If the CGI hadn't worked, I still don't think I would have used real water. I would have probably used theatrical cut-out waves, or something similar, just to keep it part of the dream world."

Supervising the various CGI effects and compositing for the picture is Nancy St. John, whose experience includes run-

ning the computer graphics division of ILM, and producing the effects for last year's tale of a talking pig, BABE. "Right from the beginning we didn't want real water," said St. John. "Henry wanted what I call a lava lamp look, so you'd be kind of mesmerized looking at it. We tried tank water, process shots, all of that kind of thing, but none of it fit the bill."

Selick is very happy with how the different effects elements are all coming together. "We have stop-motion characters acting on top of a peach that's floating in a computer-generated ocean," said the director. "On top of that, we have a painted backdrop that has some clouds moving very slowly across the sky, that's composited in digitally. It's

a good marriage of techniques, which I think is great, because I like mixing media."

St. John worked closely with Pete Kozachik, the visual effects supervisor, who also served as the film's director of photography. "At the beginning they were thinking of doing all the CGI and digital compositing on site," explained St. John. "We found it would cost more to do it in-house than if we bid the work out to other facilities."

In addition to the CGI contributed by Sony Imageworks, Buena Vista Visual Effects (BVVE) was hired to do digital compositing. "We got incredibly



Tim Hittle animates the Ladybug, Grasshopper

good prices from both places," said St. John. "The Disney executives put considerable pressure on BVVE to give us a break, and Sony made an incredible deal as well, so our effects budget is almost one-third to one-half of what it might have been if we had gone with ILM."

One complicated sequence in the film occurs during the song, "We're a Family." It's sung by the insect characters on top of the peach, as it sails through a night sky filled with stars. "That shot will have about 15 different layers to it," said St. John. "As they're singing the song, all these different elements will be in the scene. We filmed the characters on the peach against a blue screen, with motion-control and stop-motion animation. Behind the peach is a digital sky background. It's very complex work." BVVE scanned footage shot by the production into digital files and then followed detailed notes blocking out virtual camera moves provided by the filmmakers.

Given that much of the action in the film occurs on top of a floating or flying peach, eight motion-control rigs were made to simulate the rocking and rolling movements of the peach. "I call them full-motion peaches," said Kozachik, "with a respectful nod to Dennis Muren's full-motion dinosaurs in JURASSIC PARK. They're very strong rigs that can move



er, James and the Centipede, traditional frame-by-frame techniques in a computer age.

EFFECTS SMORGASBORD

“We have practically every kind of effect you can do,” said director Henry Selick. “We have over 300 composite shots. We didn’t make it any easier on ourselves.”

the six-foot, 500-pound peach on all axes. We can raise them up and down, and rotate, to simulate ocean crests and swells. Later on we have a buffeting storm sequence, where we’re really moving the peach to the maximum. We don’t cheat and move the camera, which makes things a little more difficult for the animators. They had to keep track of the center of gravity, and make sure their characters don’t lose their footing.”

The effects *piece de resistance*, comes when the peach travels through a storm of thunder clouds, and James must confront his ultimate fear, the ferocious Rhinoceros, which appears in the shape of a black cloud. The script originally called for cloud men as well, but

these were dropped as too expensive after testing. Kozachik was inspired to do the sequence like one in *POLTERGEIST* which used a “ghostly puppet made of cotton, that was puppeteered under water.”

“We called in Gary Platek, who has all this cloud tank equipment, and asked him to take over the rhino shot and make it look cool,” said Kozachik. “He put together this little robot rhino that ran in real time. It gallops and you can adjust it so its gait varies, and it has a servo-controlled head. You could stick the whole thing underwater, because it was run through a drive shaft, with the motors above the water. At first we dressed him in cotton, but he looked too cute, so he’s now more of a scary black shape

with glowing eyes, like the monster from the *Id* in *FORBIDDEN PLANET*.

“Sari Gennis provided lighting to the shot, via effects [cel] animation, composited into the scene digitally by BVVE, and we added smoke coming out his nose that’s streaming from his body whenever he’s running. Gary Platek also shot all these billowing clouds for us, that didn’t even have to look totally real, so long as they looked impressive. We used rear-screen projection to get a lot of the cloud backgrounds behind the characters, because our blue-screen facilities couldn’t handle any more shots for us. They had been maxed out, so we had five process stages doing rear or front screen projection, Harryhausen style.”

When the peach arrives in New York, it is impaled on the spire of the Empire State building, and all the bugs ride safely to the ground on seagulls. “We shot the peach already on top of the Empire State building, as a live-action element,” said St. John. Then, we shot the falling bugs, and they were all animated against a blue screen. We added the seagulls in as separate elements, and all during their fall, there’s a green light flashing on and off the Glowworm’s tail. We had a glow pass that fades in and

out of the shot, that casts a green light on the background buildings in the shot.”

When asked which shot was most difficult to accomplish, St. John laughed, “about 50 of them! Some of the CGI shots are unbelievably difficult. When the shark attacks the peach, that’s all pretty much computer generated. The water, the seagulls, the shark itself are all CGI. The peach and the bugs are the stop-motion elements, but then we have explosions, digital skies, cloud blankets. I can’t even imagine trying to do this work optically. You know, in the old days, trying to combine 15 elements in the optical printer.”

Having worked at a number of effects houses, including ILM, Pacific Data Images, Robert Abel & Associates, and Digital Productions, St. John found her experience on *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH* quite fruitful, as she was able to contribute substantially to the decision-making process. “When you work with a group of people as creative and talented as we have here, they want to have some creative ownership of the shots,” said St. John. “We have really experienced folks, who have all done time at ‘the joint,’ as Pete says— ‘the joint’ being ILM.” □

Computer graphics imagery provided a mechanical shark-like submarine that snares the peach, and the ocean waves.



CGI elements by Sony Imageworks were composited digitally by BVVE. Inset: Cel animation supervisor Sari Gennis.



JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH

WRITING THE SCREENPLAY

Adapting the Roald Dahl book was a group effort.

By Lawrence French

Some impressive writers were under consideration to turn Roald Dahl's *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH* into a workable screenplay. Among them were Dennis Potter, Bruce Joel Rubin and Caroline Thompson. However, when Disney's head of production, David Vogel, asked the relatively unknown Karey Kirkpatrick to write a draft of the script, it was Kirkpatrick's version that ultimately prevailed.

"I think it helped that Disney wanted a writer who was going to be a member of the story team," said Kirkpatrick. "I had done that before on *THE RESCUERS DOWN UNDER*, and I wasn't afraid to write over and over again, or to hand off pages to storyboard artists, who would interpret it and then send it back for revisions.

"Before I wrote my first draft, I met with Henry and Jonathan Roberts, who had done a previous draft, along with Kelly Asbury, the head storyboard artist. We wrote down all the characters' names on a big chalkboard and talked about their psychology, and what they represented to James. The Grasshopper is the father figure, the Ladybug is the doting mother, the Centipede is the wild, impetuous side, the Earthworm represents his pessimistic side, and the Spider is the dark mystery.

"Thematically what's going

on is James meets five people who are filling a parental void in his life. Of course, you can get a little carried away with those kind of interpretations, like saying when James crawls into the peach, he's actually crawling back through the birth canal and into the safety of the womb. I love that kind of thing, because even though you can go overboard with it, those are the underpinnings that make mythic stories resonate."

During the early story meetings different actors who might play the characters were also discussed. "Everyone agreed that John Gielgud would be perfect for the Grasshopper," revealed Kirkpatrick. "He's someone who has that very sophisticated, yet warm quality. James Mason would also have been good. For the Earthworm I thought of Jack Gilford, or somebody who's the British equivalent of him, a very

Conferring with the Grasshopper on the direction of their journey, James finds a travel brochure he got from his father and heads for the Big Apple.



Gulls herald James' ascent from the confines of the peach after a long trip. The challenge was to open up the action of Dahl's claustrophobic storyline.

nervous type. It was my idea to make the Centipede an American. We thought of Danny DeVito's character in *TAXI*, somebody who will get right in your face and say whatever's on his mind."

The character who presented the most trouble to Kirkpatrick was Miss Spider. "I never did get a good hold on the Spider when I was writing," admitted Kirkpatrick. "I think it was after I left, and Jonathan Roberts and Steve Bloom came on, they really tapped into how she talks. They gave her a way she messes up words when she speaks. She tells James, 'Now to sleep. You've had a very tired making day.' We wanted her to be a sensual and emotional person, so we thought of Lena Olin or Juliette Binoche, somebody with that sort of European sensibility. We also wanted to mix up the vocal palette, because we

didn't want to have six Brits that would all be sounding alike."

One plot point that got careful story consideration was to have a derelict old man (Peter Postlethwaite) give James a bag of magic green 'crocodile tongues' and tell him that, 'by taking them, marvelous things will happen.'

Noted Kirkpatrick, "We always wanted to be careful of that. We didn't want to send a [wrong] message. What's important about the old man is that the bag represents magic to be had, if you reach out and take it."

To give the script a stronger dramatic thrust, the quest that James embarks on was given more focus. "James needed a really strong reason to go to New York," stated Kirkpatrick. "In the book they just sort of land there. We came up with the notion of James' father showing him this travel brochure of New York."

Early on, the story team agreed on the necessity of keeping villainous aunts Spiker and Sponge alive, to confront James at the climax of the film. The problem was how to get them to New York. "We came up with a number of possibilities," said Kirkpatrick. "We thought, maybe we could have them on the airplane that cuts through all the strings of the peach, or even on an ocean liner. Finally, Kelly Asbury said, 'How about if they just drive up Fifth Avenue in

their car, that's all squished, covered with seaweed, with starfish clinging to it, and they get out and say they were so mad, they drove the car clear across the ocean floor.' We all laughed so hard, we said, 'That's it.' After all the movie is a fantasy, so anything can happen."

After doing six drafts of the script, Kirkpatrick found the story was pretty well set, and moved on to other projects. "It was interesting, because I was brought in to rewrite Jonathan Roberts' script," explained Kirkpatrick, "and then after I left they brought Jonathan back, this time with his writing partner Steve Bloom, to infuse some humor into the story. They were really good at making the dialogue wittier, and I thought they made some great improvements."

After toiling at Disney on many unfiled projects, *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH* will be a rewarding experience for Kirkpatrick. "It's my first big film," said Kirkpatrick, "and it was great to be chosen, because it's a little harder for someone who is unknown to be competing against award-winning writers. It was a tough adaptation, but I found no need to go away from the plot outlined in Dahl's book. If millions of children loved it, why change it? It was a thrilling experience, and it was sad to move on, but it needed to be turned over to Henry, so he could make it his. In the end, it was his vision we were all trying to tap into." □

Screenwriter Karey Kirkpatrick with Paul Terry, the English boy cast to play James in the live-action scenes.



BUGGING RICHARD DREYFUSS

“Richard Dreyfuss had just finished a movie for Disney that really knocked them out, so they wanted to use him for the Centipede. I said, ‘Let’s test him.’”



Selick, filming the underwater, cloud-tank rhino monster devised by Gary Platek (center) a servo-controlled robot mechanism that ran in real time.

were in a slightly different direction, and Fisher Stevens did a really great job. I was very happy with Fisher, but Richard had just finished a movie for Disney that really knocked them out, so they wanted to use him for the Centipede. I try to compromise where I can, so I said, 'Okay, let's test him.' Richard was a little too rough in our first session. It was a little amped up and cartoonish. Our second session was able to pull back on that, and he ended up doing a great job."

Susan Sarandon plays the Spider with a Polish accent, and brings a certain raw sexiness to the role. "Susan wasn't quite sure what she was getting into," noted Selick. "She wasn't 100% behind it at first, so we had to find a way to get her into the character. Sometimes actors who haven't done voices before don't realize we really care, and it's got to be great. It took Susan a while to take it seriously, but by showing her little bits of the film and the Spider puppet she found her way into the role, and understood what we were going for. From then on she did an amazing job for us."

For the Ladybug, Karey

Kirkpatrick had suggested Jane Leeves from *FRASIER*, but there were concerns she was too young for the maternal role. "We went through many actresses, and were having trouble finding the right person," said Selick. "She flew up here one day, got into character immediately, and we ended up using almost everything she recorded from her first session."

David Thewlis was cast as the Earthworm, based on his initial reading of the part. "He has a great voice," said Selick, "and he's a brilliant actor. This is much more of a comic turn for him than the heavy roles he's known for, like *NAKED*. If you see him in some of his other films, you might think, 'There's no way he could be this sweet and appealing character,' but he pulled it off beautifully."

Simon Callow was suggested and agreed upon instantly as the Grasshopper. "He took just a little while to find his character," said Selick. "He was marvelous, but it was scary, because six months went by and we hadn't finished recording him. He'd been off directing operas, and it took him some time to get back into character."

To play the Glowworm, Selick picked Miriam Margolyes, who was already cast in the live action as James' wicked Aunt Sponge. "Miriam does astonishing voices," noted Selick. "She played Fly, the mother dog in *BABE*, and while we were shooting the live action, she kept telling me, 'I can do voices.' I was just worried that somehow people might think Sponge is on the peach as the Glowworm, but she's playing it in a very high register, and has completely transformed herself."

For the crucial role of James, an extensive casting search began in England, where they found Paul Terry. "When he read, it just knocked me over," said Selick, "he was so fresh and real. He had very little training, but he could get really emotional, and go in and out of character. So we knew right away we had found our James."

The design of the puppet James proved to be a sticking point that almost sank the film. Ironically, Disney who had vetoed Selick's original idea of having a live actor play James throughout the movie, now insisted that the puppet James should look very realistic. "I don't like having straight puppet characters that are realistic," exclaimed Selick. "I think that's a mistake, but we went that way at first. We did a few shots, and it looked like James was an animated corpse. It was just impossible to make him look good. He had a creepy and disquieting feeling about him. There were too many movement possibilities around his mouth, and his eyes were too realistic, they looked like corpse eyes. I basically got down on my knees and begged Disney to please let me change him, before it was too late. Finally, we did. We simplified his mouth, changed his hair, and gave him button eyes, and now he feels much more like a real boy. You project onto him, and you don't look at the painful little differences you noticed before, because he was too realistic."

When all the final character designs were approved, they needed to be translated into 3-D

stop-motion puppets, though many of Smith's drawings had just one-sided perspectives for the characters. "That was one of my biggest challenges," said Smith. "After I did face-on sketches, Henry would say, 'We have to have turnarounds on these, we need to see it from all sides.' Well, I have an old book, *How To Draw Donald Duck*, that I got as a kid, so I would look at that, and they would show how to draw Donald Duck from front, back, left and right. It was a good thing I was working in New York, because all those Disney animators would have laughed me right out of the room, if they realized that's how I managed to do some of my multi-views."

To create the stop-motion puppets, Tom St. Amand began designing and building the machined precision armatures that

BUILDING A BETTER ACTOR

"We had joints in the faces," said Tom St. Amand, "rather than replacement heads. The Centipede is one of the most complex faces I've ever seen in stop motion."



The Centipede, equipped with fully armatured face and multi-arms that made animation a challenge. Inset: Character fabricator Donelle Estay builds the puppet over Tom St. Amand's armature.



joints. The thing is, you want the puppet to have real movement, as much as you can possibly get, with as few restrictions as possible. At the same time you don't want

to make things move if they don't really have to. It just makes it more complicated to animate later on."

Unlike the replacement heads that were used on NIGHTMARE, the characters of both James and the Centipede will have fully articulated faces that can be hand animated. "We had joints in the faces where we could move the eyebrows, the lips, the cheeks, all those things," noted St. Amand. "There are about 20 joints in the face of the Centipede designed by Merrick Chaney—six just for his lips, because he smokes a cigar, which he's holding in his mouth. It's one of the most complex faces I've ever seen in stop motion. It took Merrick about four weeks, just working on the design of it."

St. Amand prefers articulated faces to replacement heads even though it makes the work

difficult. "Using articulated faces, you can get these huge extremes of facial movement, that you can't do when every single expression is already worked out," he said.

Recruiting animators for the film became a big concern, as competition heated up, due to the rapid increase in projects being made, not only at other studios, but also within the Disney organization. In fact, Eric Leighton, the Oscar-nominated animation supervisor on NIGHTMARE, left to become supervisor of animation for a newly formed computer graphics division at Disney. The first film out of the gate there, will be DINO-SAUR!, a one time stop-motion project that was developed by Phil Tippett and Paul Verhoeven. Other NIGHTMARE animators left to join Pixar's TOY STORY, or did work on the Saturday morning TV show BUMP IN THE NIGHT.

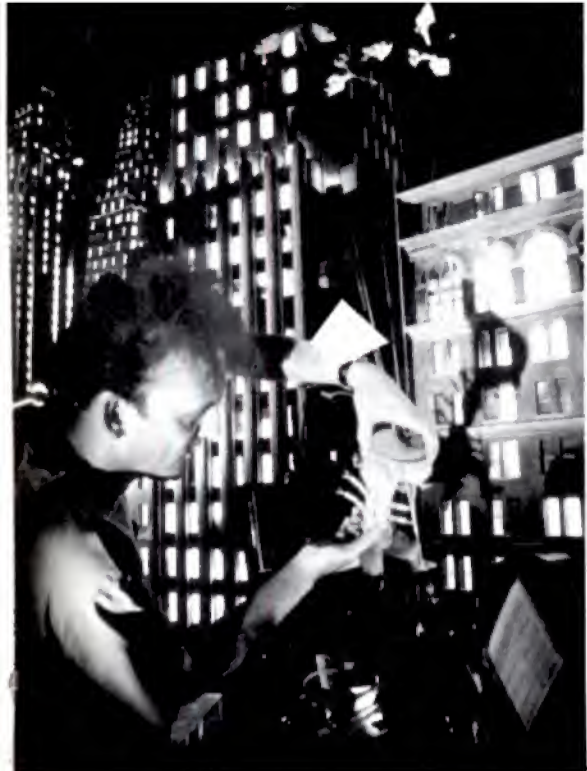
"We did manage to get a lot of people back," said Selick, "and in the interim I made arrangements for some people to work on their personal films

here. Anthony Scott, Justin Kohn, Mike Belzer, Tim Hittle, Trey Thomas, Stephen Buckley and Owen Klatt are all returning. Paul Berry is our new animation supervisor. He helps to set the basic movement for the characters, the way they walk and how they act. He helps cast the animators, who is right for each scene, and each character. Paul's their advocate and coach, and works with me in solving any acting problems that might arise. Then, after everything is in progress, he can go back and do some actual animating himself."

At the height of production, JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH had 20 animators toiling away, about five more than worked on NIGHTMARE. Especially imported from Will Vinton's studio in Oregon was Webster Colcord. New recruits to the staff are Kent Burton, Jerold Howard, Sean Burns, Chris Gilligan, Paul Jessie, Josephine Huang, and Guionne Leroy. "Guionne is actually from Pixar," said Selick, "but she missed doing stop motion so much, she came over here. We're using more animators, because we tried to wrap-up more quickly than we did on NIGHTMARE. On JAMES we'll only be a year in animation, while NIGHTMARE took two years. Even so, it still takes a long time before everyone hits their stride, and we get high quality footage coming out at a consistent rate."

Noted St. Amand, "At first, they didn't plan to have more than 12 animators. That eventually changed, and as they brought in more animators, we found we needed to build three more puppets for each of the main characters. Three more Ladybugs, three more Grasshoppers, and so forth. That happened about eight months into the shooting schedule."

With many shots in the film featuring the seven main characters all together on top of a peach, one lone animator might be faced with 30 limbs, or more, to be manipulated for every frame in a shot. (That's even more than what Ray Harryhausen had to contend with in his three man vs. seven skeletons sword fight, at the climax of JASON AND THE



Supervising animator Paul Berry positions the Caterpillar, landing in New York. Right: The peach in Central Park, production design by Harley Jessup.

ARGONAUTS). That meant a five second shot could require over 2,000 separate movements to the puppets. "That's why we have a lot of teaming up on the shots," noted St. Amand. "In some instances one animator will do it all. It just depends on whether two people can comfortably fit into the space."

To supervise the shooting of the animation footage, Pete Kozachik returned as director of photography, after being nominated for an Academy Award for his special effects contributions to *THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS*. Kozachik supervised eight camera crews, each consisting of an operator and two assistants. "What I do is meet with the operator and go over the shot with him," explained Kozachik. "I'll discuss the colors, look, and feel of the shot and how it all fits together. Then the crew has several days to light and tweak the scene to get it right. In the opening wide shots, we essentially set the look of a sequence, so everyone who works on a sequence after that has to adhere to certain rules."

One of Kozachik's early concerns was attempting to light the cave-like interior of the peach pit. "We started out trying to be somewhat logical about light sources," said Kozachik, "but there weren't many places where the light could be coming from. What we usually ended up doing is having some other source, not necessarily ex-

plained, illuminating the scene as well."

One obvious advantage of stop-motion filmmaking is the incredible array of sets that can be assembled and built, at a fraction of the cost it might take to build the same sets for a live-action movie. Under one studio roof in San Francisco, the crews on *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH* can build and shoot on 26 separate stages concurrently. To do those same shots with life-size sets might easily take the combined studios of both Warner Bros. and Disney.

Overseeing the set construction for *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH* is Bo Henry, who, along with Gregg Olsson, had to realize the final designs provided by the art department. "I have to not only build the sets as designed," said Henry, "but build them for access to the animators and the cameras. The camera is often a major character, and a set may have to be able to break away, or be built

specifically for a couple of different angles that will allow the camera to get into the necessary position. We often shoot below the eye level of the characters, so the camera, in scale to the puppets, is huge. At times we have to compromise between the final look of the set, and what will be structurally sound enough to allow the animators to use tie-down holes, and be able to get up and crawl around on the sets."

For *NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS* Henry and Olsson built over 200 different miniature sets. Their task on *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH* involved mainly duplicating varying sections of the peach interior and exterior. "We built multitudes of peaches and peach pit interiors," said Henry. "They varied in thickness from a slice that represented anywhere from two-thirds to one-twelfth of the whole peach. The whole peach was about six feet in scale, so to give animators better access to it, we gen-

erally built the one-twelfth section for the very top portion of the peach."

For a miniature set of ice-flows covering the Arctic Ocean, Henry and Olsson built a beautiful set measuring 35 by 40 feet, complete with a cyclorama backdrop. Noted Henry, "Henry Selick wanted it to look as if the ice was really floating on the water, and to do that, I designed a wave form that slowly goes through it. We put these cranks underneath the set, so it looked like the surface was very slowly undulating."

Added Selick, "It was amazing. It creates a very subtle rising and falling motion in the ice pack. It really gives a sense of weight and scale to the shot."

The one drawback with the Arctic Ocean set was its relatively large size. "I got some talking to on that set," revealed production designer Harley Jessup. "I was thinking, 'It's not that big,' especially compared to the miniatures we built on the main stage at ILM. But it was

explained to me that it's a major stage commitment to be designing sets that large. The problem is, we're dealing with reduced space allotments, in order to meet our shooting deadlines. We started out with 15 stages, and we've subdivided some of them, until now we're up to 24 stages."

Usually, Olsson and Henry would get only one day to put out the set and get it up exactly right for animation. "Then we have to make whatever changes are needed," said Henry.

Art director Kendal Cronkhite puts finishing touches on a cloud set prior to filming.



"We had one set that everybody and his dog had looked at beforehand, [Marble, the shop dog, even gets an end screen credit], then suddenly they decided they needed an access area, so we cut an access area into it, with the hopes that we wouldn't have to pull back later, and redress the set."

At the height of production, 24 or more stages were shooting simultaneously, which means the eight camera crews have to light and troubleshoot several different stages. "Since each shot takes so long to fin-



James lands in the Arctic. Inset right: Book illustrator and character designer Lane Smith. Inset left: Sculptor Kamela Portuges readies a James puppet.

ish, the crews can leapfrog back and forth," explained Kozachik. "There's an occasional bottleneck where three animators are ready to start a shot on the same day, and there's only one crew available. Then it gets tough, but primarily we've been really fortunate in the way the dice have rolled."

Since the animators are essentially the actors, such a demanding schedule leaves them precious little breathing room to get into their character, or "feel" their part. They have to deliver whether the mood is with them, or not. "You might want to go home, but you can't have that show up in the acting," said St. Amand. "That's actually happened to me a couple of times, where everything in the shot is going along fine, and then at the end, all of a sudden it speeds up. When you look at it, you can tell, 'Oh, he wanted to go home, didn't he.'"

While the production was still gearing up for animation, Selick began filming the live-action segments of the movie at two decommis-

sioned Naval stations (appropriately enough, for the story of an ocean voyage). On Treasure Island, a man-made isle in the middle of San Francisco bay, enormous hangars housed the English hillside sets, where James lives with his aunts, and is given a bag of magic green crocodile tongues by a derelict stranger. Hunters Point Naval station was used to recreate the sets of New York's Fifth Avenue and the Empire State Building. Selick had done hardly any live-action direction, but found the experience exhilarating.

"It was really great as a change of pace," said Selick. "In animation everything is so carefully planned and delineated, and I tried to do the same thing for the live action, but I quickly realized you can't do that, you'd never get all the shots you need. So I had to reinvent every day, and deal with what was in front of me, instead of what was planned. I'd glance at storyboards and notes of what we were going for, and then just put it away and have to think on my feet. We had a very small crew, with Hiro Narita as the cameraman, and we were budgeted just a little too tightly. We

could have used about two more days."

For a sequence where the giant peach rolls down the English hillside, production designer Harley Jessup thought he'd do it as a miniature effects shot. "Henry said, 'No, I really want it to roll down the hill,'" revealed Jessup. "Then, I thought, 'Well, when it rolls over the car, we'll do that with an effect,' but Henry wanted that done with a giant peach as well. So we made two 20-foot peaches out of bed foam. They were hollow, but they still weighed over a ton. They were so big they couldn't travel on the freeway, so we had to put one on a big barge to get it out to the studio on Treasure Island. It was pretty wild, because that peach had a life of its own, once it started rolling."

In fact, things did get out of control for one shot, when the giant peach rolls over and crushes Spiker and Sponge's car. "It was rolling down the hill, and was about to roll over some cameras," remembered Selick. "It was scary, because people were running up to it, trying to stop it, and the thing weighed over a ton, so it could

have rolled right over them!"

For the live-action settings, Selick wanted a very stylized approach, that would relate to the stop-motion sequences, but at the same time have a different feel about them. "I wanted the live action to look a little phony, like opera sets, and be slightly monochromatic," said Selick. "I liked the idea of going into a dream world, and having the colors really intense, then at the end, coming back into the reality of live action, but having James bring a little bit of the dream with him. I'm also a big fan of Ray Harryhausen, so I wanted to have a mix of live action with stop motion. At the end when the bugs appear in New York we have some interplay between the stop motion and the live action."

Selick went for an art deco '40s New York to give the film a certain timelessness. "I didn't want them to land in the New York of today," he said. "We thought it would

add an element of grunge and disharmony to things. It's an off-kilter New York, more related to a Busby Berkeley musical."

Interestingly, by going for a stylization in the live-action sets, the two worlds seem to tie together extremely well. "We didn't plan it that way," said art director Bill Boes, "but the live-action sets look like miniatures, with real live people walking on them. Even though they were full scale sets, they still have a miniature quality about them."

Inspired by the skeleton battle in *JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS* and the Hyperborean setting of *SINBAD AND THE EYE OF THE TIGER*, Selick came up with a show-stopping action sequence as a homage to Ray Harryhausen. It features the Centipede, the Spider and James doing battle with a motley crew of pirate skeletons, below the icy waters of the Arctic. "We really needed a sequence that gets them off the peach," explained Kirkpatrick.

The battle allows the Centipede to use his ten hands to excellent advantage and the Spider uses her eight legs for some fancy kicking maneuvers. "We even have a special guest

JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH



CHARACTER DESIGN

Children's book illustrator Lane Smith added his distinctive touch.

By Lawrence French

Lane Smith's imaginative illustrations for many best-selling children's books (like *The Stinky Cheese Man*, and his latest, *Math Curse*) bring a certain irreverent avant-garde sensibility into that field, not unlike Roald Dahl brought to his children's stories. That would seem to make Smith the ideal candidate to work with Henry Selick on the character designs for *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH*. Selick originally contacted Smith, who turned out to be a big stop motion fan, to work on *THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS*.

Said Smith, "One of the great things about stop motion is it goes to what the essence of what animation is, which is bringing inanimate objects to life. That's really why I love it. I didn't get to work on *NIGHTMARE*, because there came a point where Tim Burton had to make the call, and he already had a really strong vision, and obviously the film had to be his vision. But when the movie came out, I thought it was fantastic, and Henry contacted me again about working on *JAMES*."

Smith flew out to San Francisco for a week out of every month, while doing most of his design sketches back at his New York studio, working from the Dahl book and early script drafts. Smith likened his Centipede design to Popeye [the sailor man], although he didn't consciously attempt to make him that way. "Centipede sticks his chest out, walks on these little bow legs,



Smith's design for the Ladybug. The work proved a joy for the long-time stop-motion buff.

has a big cigar, and talks out of the side of his mouth," explained Smith. "I don't know how, but maybe because my brain's been polluted with so many years of cartoons and pop culture, it just came out that way."

Like Selick, Smith was a fan of fine artists like George Grosz, Paul Klee and Marc Chagall, and wanted to specifically move away from the traditional style of Disney animation. "I think one of the

reasons Henry and I worked so well together is because we have a lot of the same influences," explained Smith. "A lot of those [Disney] guys, they grow up watching Disney, they go to Cal Arts, and the day they graduate, they go to work at Disney. They're all sort of weaned on Mickey Mouse, while Henry seems to have this sort of rogue group of HOGAN'S HEROES-type animators and designers working with him, and you can actually talk to them about painters like Edward Hopper and Kurt Schwitters, or

Smith, author and illustrator of the popular children's book, *The Stinky Cheese Man*, provided character designs that will be familiar to his fans.



The Centipede, a swaggering American voiced by Richard Dreyfuss, seen by Smith in the mold of Popeye, the Sailor, a complex figure to animate.

animators like Svankmajer and Starewicz, and they know that as much as 'The Pirates of the Caribbean.'"

Noted Selick, "I thought Lane would be perfect for *JAMES* because his work was like a second cousin to mine, softer, but still not cutesy. It's more dream-like, and the shapes are like Paul Klee, and the characters are very endearing, without being cliched. The traditional Disney cel animation is brilliant, but there is very definitely a house style, and there's not really that much variance from it. I wanted to do something different, go for something a little fresher. Yet, even though Lane is one of the top children's book illustrators in the country, it was still difficult to convince the people at Disney to support what he was doing."

Smith was originally contracted to work on the film for a six-month period, but eventually stayed on longer, simply because he was enjoying it so much. "I wasn't obligated to do any more work," recalled Smith, "but I kept coming up with excuses to come back. I'd say, 'Hey, do you need me to design any of the skeleton's shoes? If I wasn't getting paid, I'd probably be an annoying fan, saying, 'Can I come by and watch you make the movie?'" □

appearance by Jack Skellington," said Selick, referring to the puppet star of his NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS. "His design is changed a little bit, so now he's more like a Red Beard type of pirate. He's got a cutlass and a bicorne hat, with a funny-looking skeleton parrot on his shoulder."

Lane Smith also designed some of the skeletons, including a skeleton general, that was influenced by Jiri Trinka's THE HAND. "There's a great scene at the end of THE HAND," recalled Smith, "where the main character dies and the hand puts all these medals all over his costume. I drew this generic skeleton with a fantastical military outfit on him, and put all these medals and ribbons over his outfit. Then Henry came up with the idea of making it into Jack Skellington, as a cameo. I did another skeleton with a long lower jaw on him, which I thought looked pretty neat. Henry saw it and said, 'It looks like Donald Duck.' So that became the skeleton duck. I didn't even realize it, but because he was in a sailor suit, and he had this long bill-like jaw, he did look a lot like Donald Duck."

The main action of the Pirate battle takes place on a derelict Spanish galleon, with a hodgepodge of other ships in the background. "I tried to give

Art director Kendal Cronkhite's conceptual sketches for "Cloud Man" (top) and "Cloud People" (bottom).



JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH



PRODUCTION DESIGN

Harley Jessup on heading the design team that envisioned Dahl's fantasy.

By Lawrence French

To bring to life a world where a giant peach can become a seaworthy sailing ship, Henry Selick enlisted the services of an old colleague, Harley Jessup. Selick had first met Jessup while working on the cut-out animated film, TWICE UPON A TIME, and both storyboarded sequences for Disney's RETURN TO OZ. Later Jessup began working as effects art director on a myriad of projects at George Lucas' ILM, including INNERSPACE, THE HUNT FOR RED OCTOBER, HOOK, and FIRE IN THE SKY.

"I had talked to Harley about various projects," said Selick, "but nothing ever clicked, until JAMES finally came along. He is very confident with his design sense, and did all the live-action sets. We have two art directors, Bill Boes and Kendal Cronkhite, working under Harley, who were very familiar with stop motion, so they helped Harley get in tune with the stop-motion world."

For Jessup, the goal was getting the movie's design to work together as a whole, even though it would have three distinct segments. "It starts out on an English hillside," noted Jessup, "then they go on this incredible journey across the ocean, and finally they wind up on Fifth Avenue in New York. To get that to all work together



Production designer Harley Jessup.

was a real challenge, within the parameters of what we could do physically.

"Because the beginning and end are live action, that posed another problem. How would we blend and relate the two worlds together? We wanted the animation world to be much more expansive in its feeling, while the live action would be more con-

fining. We went for a very stark, high-contrast look at the beginning, where James is living in this tiny attic room with his aunts. Then when they first come out of the peach, after landing on the ocean, James opens the hatch and sees this vast seascape, so it's a very exhilarating and liberating moment for him."

To create a color contrast in the two worlds, a chart was worked out early on, to help shape the colors for the final design of the sets. "That helped us get a

general impression of what colors for the scenes would be like," said Jessup. "We did it for both the live action, and the animation, and it allows you to make the color work in a way that dramatically fits what's happening in the scene. We made the live action very monochromatic, except for the peach itself, which would stand out

Harley Jessup's early concepts for the peach's encounter with the rhino cloud.





Book illustrator Lane Smith's concept for James' encounter with the dreaded rhino, elaborating on Dahl's story ideas and imagery to craft new sequences.

very brilliantly against its background. Then in the animation we went for very rich and saturated colors, so it had some relationship with what was done in *THE WIZARD OF OZ*."

Selick wanted to give a very stylized look to the live-action settings, and several widely divergent films were looked at for design influences. Among them were the documentary *GREY GARDENS* (for the decaying world of the two aunts), the musical *WEST SIDE STORY* (for its stylization of New York street scenes), and the *film noir* *NIGHT OF THE HUNTER* (for its stark settings of a child's room). For the peach itself, Selick wanted to make it as realistic as possible.

"Nobody's ever seen a 20-foot peach before," noted Jessup, "so we took pictures of real peaches, and did sculptures and sketches to get the look Henry wanted. We went for a dappled look, and did a couple of differ-

ent color variations on it, but getting the materials to translate drawings into a giant peach was a real operation.

"We wanted a soft look, so over a beadfoam interior, we put about two inches of soft foam rubber, and then covered that with this fiberfill fuzz. For the smaller six-foot peaches we're using in animation, we came up with a felt covering, that's actually very animation friendly. We did some experiments with the peach fuzz, because we didn't want you to see twitching fiberfill, when the characters were moving around on top of the peach, so we matted down the peach fuzz, to get it very close to the surface. Then, we were able to fill in the tie-down holes, so they're completely invisible."

To design the interior of the peach, which would serve as a cabin for James and his insect friends, Jessup tried several ap-

WIZARD OF COLOR DESIGN

"In the animation we went for very rich, saturated colors," said production designer Harley Jessup. "We made the live action monochromatic like WIZARD OF OZ."

proaches. "We started out with a very organic interior," recalled Jessup, "and then tried the exact opposite, where it looked almost like the inside of a steamship cabin, or a blimp. In the end we went with the idea of making it look like a kid's treehouse, with many levels, and we proposed that things from the garden had gotten swept up and enlarged inside of the peach, along with the bugs. So the floor is a big sundial, and there's an enlarged seed-packet on the wall, along with a big garden rake. We were really playing with scale, and it made it possible for us to get a nice contrast between the organic shape we invented for the interior, and the synthetic objects from the garden, that got stuck inside."

Jessup cracked open an actual peach pit, to see what it looked like, but found it unsuitable for the interior design. "It's totally smooth," said Jessup, "so we made it look more like the inside of a walnut shell, almost as if it had been chewed out by the bugs. Because the interior was a cave-like setting, we tried to make some of the edges translucent, so you get a soft backlit type of effect, almost like stained glass windows. There are also little nooks and crannies, and off-screen holes, so it allows for a sort of ambient light to come streaming through. It gives a sort of cathe-

dral-like feeling to a couple of scenes."

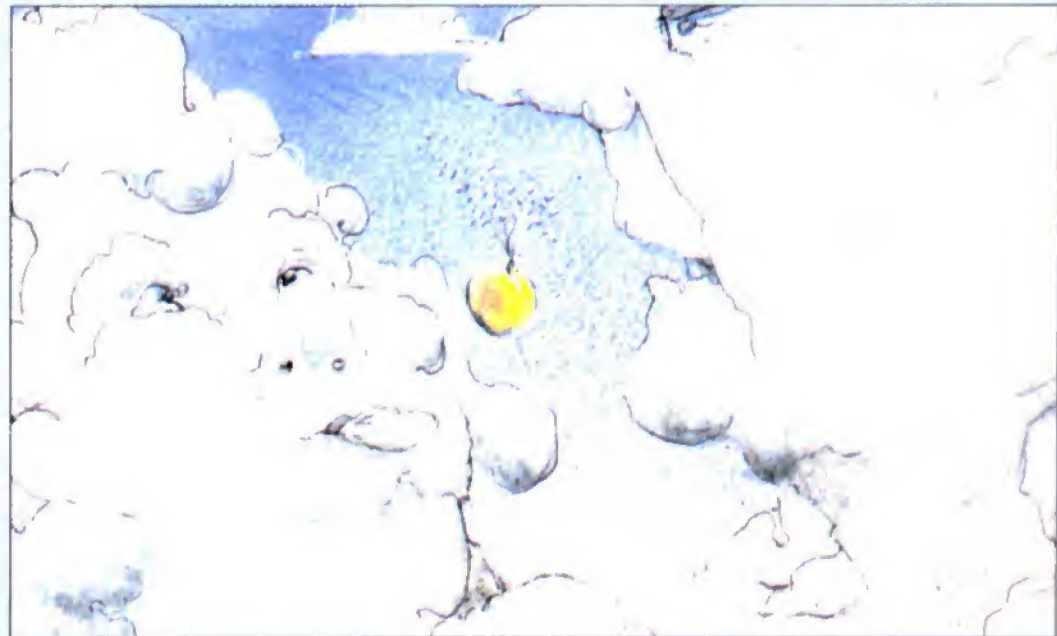
When the peach comes under attack from a huge shark, James gets the idea of attaching spider webbing to seagulls flying overhead, which lifts the peach out of the water, and makes much of the journey into a Jules Verne-like balloon voyage. "We wanted the characters to be involved in directing their trip," noted Jessup. "We didn't just want the seagulls to end up hauling them to New York, so we made the peach stem into the steering wheel. All the seagulls are tied to the stem, and the Centipede or James steer the peach by pulling it around, so it's like the wheel of a ship. We also added a platform around the peach, which was Henry's idea, because having all the characters on the top could get to be a little confining. So when the peach rolls down the hill, it picks up a wooden fence that attaches itself to the sides of the peach, and the characters can use it like a lookout platform, and have more room to move about."

Summing up his experience on the film, Jessup noted, "It was fun to work with Henry [Selick]. Henry was very open to having everyone present him with ideas, and then he would be the one to rein us in. He wanted to thoroughly explore every design aspect." □

Jessup's early design concept for the interior look of James' giant peach.



Keeping the threat of villains Spiker and Sponge, Jessup's demon cloud idea.



JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH



ARMATURES & ANIMATION

Tom St. Amand on the art of stop-motion puppetry.

By Lawrence French

For JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH, Tom St. Amand and his crew, (including Daniel Campbell, Chris Rand, Marc Ribaud, David Mesloh and Rodney Morgan), designed intricate armatures for each of the seven main characters. Although St. Amand would have to accommodate many more legs than usual for his armature designs, it wasn't an insurmountable hurdle. "There's a typical way that I'll design a human figure," said St. Amand, "and except for the spider, most of the characters in JAMES were sort of human-like. So I was able to repeat [designs]."

St. Amand, like many animators, was inspired by TV airings of Willis O'Brien's KING KONG and Ray Harryhausen's 7TH VOYAGE OF SINBAD. Working professionally since 1978, St. Amand has become the acknowledged master of armature-making in his field, having worked on films like EMPIRE STRIKES BACK, JURASSIC PARK and THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS.

Amand is interested in learning the whole process of stop-motion, from building the armatures and fabricating the puppets to doing the actual animation itself. "Over the last 18 years I've spent 70% of the time building armatures, and only 30% animating," said St. Amand. "I like doing both, but

if you're going to build armatures, you really should animate as well to get a feel for how the puppet moves. After you build it you need to do a walk cycle with it, try and balance it on one foot, and see how it handles. It's very instructive, especially if you want the puppet to be expressive and work at its optimum."

St. Amand designed James and the Centipede to have fully articulated faces instead of replacement heads. That makes animation more difficult, but St. Amand prefers the spontaneity to the by-the-numbers quality of replacement animation. "When you have replacement heads, it's all worked out beforehand," said St. Amand. "For frame 52, you need an 'Ooh' sound, and here's the head you need. Doing that, I think you can fall into the trap of repeating the same expressions in every shot. When



Chris Gilligan animates the Grasshopper and Centipede on Harley Jessup's expansive arctic set, frame-by-frame work requiring intense concentration.

you get to decide how to bring it to life, I think it's more interesting working that way."

When it came to the actual animating of the insects, St. Amand found it wasn't necessary to move every single appendage of a character for every frame in a shot. "You can actually lock off certain parts to give you a breather," said St. Amand. "That's the art of it, knowing whether you need to move something or not. You work out all of your basic timings beforehand, with frame counts and timing sheets, but it's still surprising to see what the finished shot looks like, because it's never exactly what you imagined. It's just a real challenge to bring the idea you have in your head to fruition."

One help to the animators is a video frame grabber that can now store almost a whole shot. That allows the animators the

opportunity to see their work in progress. "You can actually see if the shot is too fast, or too slow," said St. Amand. "That gives you the chance to change it while you're still shooting."

One goal Henry Selick sought was to get real use out of the extra arms and legs on the insect puppets. "I pushed hard to keep all the extra appendages and antennae," said Selick. "But when you have those extra limbs, you have to figure out what to do with them. So we put in some acting that is very bug-like. Touching their antennae, grooming, adjusting, things like that. Ultimately we used the extra arms to enhance gestures. The Centipede had a lot of extra hands, so he's a good fighter, and he gestures with a sort of fanfare of hands, one after another. Of course, if you're really going to make something of those extra limbs, it means a lot of extra work in every frame. Quite often we'll fold three arms, and gesture with one, then a second arm joins in, then they fold, and the bottom ones do something else. However, we found if you have too much going on at the same time, you don't know what to follow, so we don't animate each limb in every single frame, but in every shot they all come into play."

To get the insects to act with real, bug-like mannerisms, Selick and the animators looked at footage of real bugs. "I didn't just want them to be Jiminy

Armature builder Mark Buck works on St. Amand's ball-and-socket designs for two of the skeletal undersea warriors who attack James in the Arctic.



Crickets," said Selick, "with two hands and two feet. They're much more of a hybrid between people and bugs than has ever been done in the past."

Although Tom St. Amand didn't look at any real insects for his work on *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH*, he had experience animating the giant ant in *HONEY, I SHRUNK THE KIDS*. "I studied footage of ants and scorpions to get their walk-cycles down," revealed St. Amand. "They walk with a very consistent cycle. Anthony Scott is doing a lot of animation with the Spider, and he worked out a complete walk cycle. It's all on a chart, and the other animators can refer to it. The challenge is to give each character his own individual personality, which is sometimes hard when you have four or five characters in a single shot. I began by looking at all the footage that had already been shot, and talking with the other animators. Then it might take you four or five shots to find the character, just like an actor might need several takes to get into character."

For non-animators, the concentration and dedication demanded by stop-motion animation is almost mind-boggling. "It's very painstaking and exacting work, so you really have to love it," said St. Amand. "You might not always be in the best mood, and then you're really in a tough spot, but I have no regrets about getting into this business. There's still something magical about it. It sounds naive, but when I see the finished film, I still can't believe the puppets move." □

St. Amand (r) animates with Pete Kozachik (l), the film's director of photography and effects supervisor.



STRETCHING THE MEDIUM

"I'd like to do some adult films in stop motion," said Selick. "There's a long tradition of adult puppet films in eastern Europe, but here it's hung-up on kids."



Animator Richard Zimmerman uses a position gauge to check his move on the Centipede. A video tap (left) allows the animator to review previous frames.

those ships a creepy, haunted feeling to them," said art director Bill Boes. "We shot it all in-camera. We put a scrim between the galleon and the background boats to make them look farther away. To get the undersea effect we're using ripple glass, which is plexi-glass you melt a little bit with a heat gun, and move it in front of the camera lens while their animating the shot. Then we'll add air bubbles with a separate pass, to the same shot."

To write four songs for the movie, Selick approached Elvis Costello, who showed an interest in doing the film. Unfortunately, Disney's music division showed no interest in Costello. "Their alarms just went off, and they said, 'No, that's too weird,'" said Selick.

Disney suggested Randy Newman as an alternative. "I didn't want to use Randy," said Selick, "only because John Lasseter was already using him for *TOY STORY*." Selick wanted Andy Partridge, the main songwriter from the rock group XTC. Partridge did some demo songs for the film, "one of

which was very beautiful," said Selick, "but Disney couldn't make a deal with him." Randy Newman stepped in to take over. "After seeing who Disney would accept, and who they proposed, I think we've really done well with him," said Selick. "I didn't want to have the typical Disney thing, where it's a Broadway type of musical. I was looking for more of a British music-hall type of sound, and that's working out well with Randy. For one song, 'Eating the Peach,' we've taken the Roald Dahl lyrics right from the book, and Randy has just set them to music."

Newman will also provide the film's all important background score, a vital component in stop motion. Ray Harryhausen realized this fact early on, after being impressed by the tremendous impact Max Steiner's music made in bringing *KING KONG* to life. One only hopes that Selick can pull a better score out of Newman than the uninspired Mickey Mouse music he came up with for *TOY STORY*.

"Randy's open to suggestions, and seems to respond if you have good ideas," said Selick. "He's just done a musi-

cal version of *FAUST*, which has really good songs, so I'm hoping he's got the energy left to do our film. In the temp score I've used Stravinsky's 'The Firebird Suite' and Moussorgsky's 'Pictures at an Exhibition' and Randy liked that. He picked up on those, so I think we'll do okay."

With *JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH* nearing completion, Selick found a new home at Miramax Films, who will fund his new production company, Twitching Image. For stop-motion enthusiasts, that could mean a new film every few years, a prospect not seen since Ray Harryhausen retired. "I've been interested in forming a partnership that will allow us to continue making these films for a long time," says Selick. "After talking to a variety of people, I decided to go with Miramax. They're owned by Disney, but have creative autonomy. I'd like to do some adult films in stop motion, as well. There's a long tradition of adult films from eastern Europe, but over here we're just too hung-up on animation as a base for kids. The type of stories I want to do are a little more off-beat than Disney animation, although they could still be family films. I'm just interested in taking a different path."

Miramax will also develop short films and begin grooming animators as possible directors. "I can't direct every movie," admitted Selick. "It's too hard. I haven't had any time off in four years! When I went into business with Miramax, I got some key people under contract. I told them, 'You can't just hire me, because without these key people, I can't do stop motion.' Miramax got behind us pretty quickly, and made some generous deals, including giving people breathing room between projects, and funding short films."

Whatever Selick does next, he has planted roots that will allow stop motion to grow and flourish well into the 21st century, standing tall alongside the more traditional cel animation. He sums up his position succinctly, stating, "I'm dedicated to this way of making movies. I could do cel animation, or computer animation, but stop motion is what I really love to do." □

COMING

Dan Persons

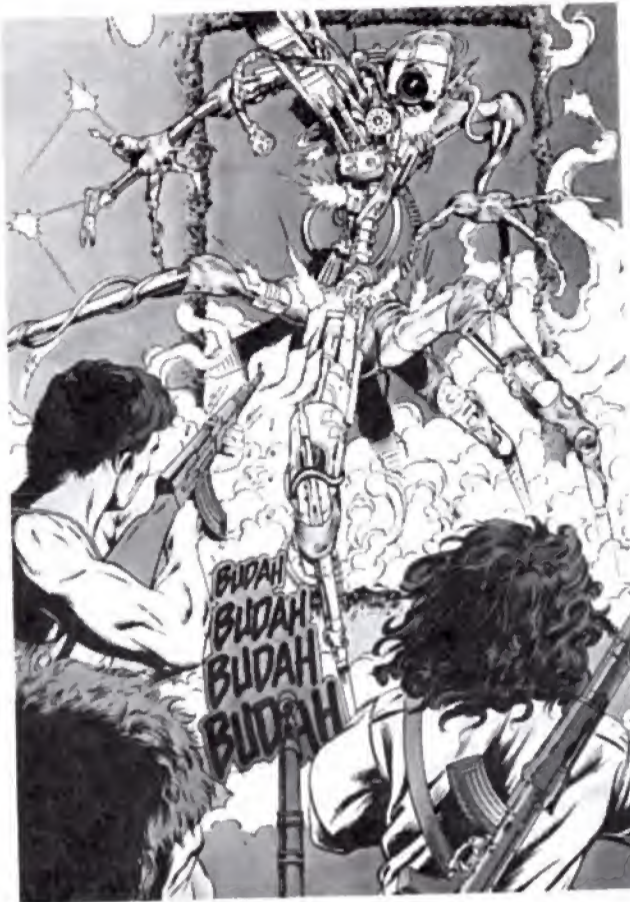
Welcome, welcome, dear friends, to another installment of *Coming Attractions*, the Olestra of film columns. That's right, just like a potato chip infused with high-tech, FDA-approved fat substitute, we glide smoothly and swiftly through your thought processes, imparting the satisfaction of a full reading experience without any of those heavy, intellectual calories. An altogether benign experience, to be sure, and certainly worth the mild case of cerebral seepage you'll experience as a side-effect. But you be the judge. Please, sit back, relax, note the government-imposed warning label at the bottom of the page, and sample some of this month's delicacies:

MEAT 'N' MECHANICS

The crew of a storm-besieged, ocean-going tug think they've encountered a stroke of good luck when they stumble upon an abandoned Chinese research vessel. They couldn't be more wrong. Fleeing their foundering ship for the nuclear-powered vessel, they stumble into a nightmare where the corpses of dead seamen, a tangle of electronic equipment, and the very ship itself conspire to effect their deaths. Based on the Dark Horse graphic novel of the same name, *VIRUS* promises to usher in a new sub-genre in the field of action-filmmaking, one that mates the visceral nightmares of John Carpenter's *THE THING* with the industrial sheen of James Cameron's *TERMINATOR* series. Call it "gristle-tech"—a stylistic innovation that producer Universal has fittingly tapped Digital Domain head and Cameron associate John Bruno to helm.

Back from a 30-day location shoot for Cameron's *TITANIC* (which is only a slight understatement: the location was the 12,000 foot-deep resting place of the *Titanic* itself), Bruno discussed his motivations in taking on the project: "It takes place on a ship in a hurricane, and I'm just coming off a ship in a hurricane. We were filming the *Titanic*, and I did two dives on it, and the 30 days we were out there we were hit with one hurricane—Hurricane Lewis—and avoided two others. When I looked at the comic book and looked at the script, I saw the potential and I knew how to do the film, and the studio agreed. Ever since *THE ABYSS*—and I got an Oscar for *THE ABYSS*—I know how to work with water."

With *SPECIES* author Dennis Feldman working on the screenplay and Gale Anne Hurd slated to produce, *VIRUS* is expected to go before the cameras in late spring/early summer, in anticipation of a summer '97 re-



VIRUS, the Dark Horse graphic novel, comes to the screen from Oscar-winning effects ace John Bruno, making his directorial debut for Universal.

lease. Given Universal's involvement, though, and their previous experiences with a little aquatic trifle called *W*T*RW*RLD*, has Bruno experienced any trepidation from the MCA brass about a cinematic return to the sea? "No, they're making pictures. It's just, 'Go make movies.' This one is substantial—they're not cutting corners on it, they like it. This is the type of movie I want to go see during the summer, with *lots* of people that like to eat popcorn and get scared. This is the sort of movie I wish somebody would make for me. And, luckily, I'm getting a chance to make it for me."

WEB-CRUISERS CATCH TROMA AROMA

When we were able to reach Troma topper Lloyd Kaufman, the creator of the *Toxic Avenger* and *Sgt. Kabukiman* was anxious to have us consider the finer points of the cover art for the company's latest video release: "We feel that the red warning label creates a lovely motif based on the balance of light-and-shadow, with the yellow-and-black cover lending an air of Rembrandtesque chiaroscuro." Sounds cool, considering it's all for a little something called *BEWARE: CHILDREN AT PLAY*.

Actually, Kaufman was much more eager to discuss Troma's big push onto the Internet. No wimpy little Web-based promo-site for these guys—they're going fully interactive, with a contest that will result in the first film developed and scripted on the

World Wide Web: *CLASS OF NUKE 'EM HIGH IV: BATTLE OF THE BIKINI SUB-HUMANIDS*.

The set-up of this competition-cum-break-session is simplicity itself: participants submit two-page segments of script to the Troma Web site, their plots turning on requirements set down by the fertile minds of the Troma Team. Every few weeks, a winner is declared, and the lucky scribe receives a handsome stipend of fifty dollars (are you sure Joe Eszterhas got started this way?). The results are published on the Web, and scripting continues, round-robin style, until the full, 80-page masterpiece is complete.

"What strikes me is how seriously people are taking this," said Kaufman of a project that will eventually see 40 names listed under the screenwriting credit (hey, only eight shy of *THE FLINTSTONES*!). "We're getting excellent material. And then they revise them and send them in the next day. They're really taking it seriously, and it's heartening to see the marvelous talent that's out there that seems to appreciate Troma."

At this point, Kaufman doesn't expect the completed script to get before the cameras for "months, maybe a year." In the interim, there are more than enough projects on-deck for the Hell's Kitchen-based production company. Kaufman, in his guise as director, recently wrapped *TROMEIO AND JULIET*, a fractured adaptation of Shakespeare that not only offers up *Toxie* and *Kabukiman* in cameo roles, but also promises, according to Kaufman, "all the car-crashes, mutations, decapitations, and de-Capulet-ations that Shakespeare always wanted."

But, given that he's spent five years bringing this literary classic to the screen, how does Kaufman feel about another studio's recent announcement of their own, modern-dress adaptation of *ROMEO AND JULIET*, starring Leonardo DeCaprio and directed by *STRICTLY BALLROOM*'s Baz Luhrmann? "We're very upset," the impresario confided. "We're mainly upset because they're using a talented director, and we feel that's very unfair. But we're the first; we're ahead of 'em."

[The *CLASS OF NUKE 'EM HIGH* competition may still be underway. If you want to try your hand at scripting (and feel you'll still be able to look your family in the eyes afterward), you can reach the Troma Web site at <http://www.troma.com/home>.]

POTATOES FOR THE POOR, RICE FOR THE RICH

That Anne Rice is turning into a regular epistolary tornado. Having apparently been

ATTRACTIONS

gratified by the attention paid to a previous open-letter—one which, in essence, insisted that everyone should ignore her previous tirade against the casting of Tom Cruise in *INTERVIEW WITH A VAMPIRE* and go out to see the film immediately—she has now been emboldened to try her hand in the heady realms of politics. While it's doubtful that "A Personal Letter to President Clinton"—published as a full-page ad in *Weekly Variety*—will have the same influence on American politics as, say, *The Federalist*, it does provide striking proof why some people are better off restricting their literary efforts to homoerotic fantasies about charismatic vampires.

"Dear President Clinton:" the letter begins. "Please come out for a flat income tax and beat the Republicans to the punch. Then you and Mrs. Clinton can return to your true mission—to bring health care and economic prosperity to all Americans."

In ensuing paragraphs, we learn that President Clinton "and Vice President Gore are our great creative [sic] hope." This last is a curious assertion, considering that Clinton and Gore have previously demonstrated their advocacy of the creative process via the endorsement of V-chip technology that would force government-imposed censorship on television broadcasts, and Clipper chip protocols that would permit law-enforcement agencies easy access to electronic communications. Not the kind of policies an author well-known for her S&M rewrites of the *Sleeping Beauty* legend should be supporting.

The most fascinating sections of Rice's screed are those in which she gives us tantalizing insight into how she regards her own position in the world. Key among the you-probably-should-have-kept-that-to-yourself goodies: that she regards gifts to "elderly relatives" and "young family members in college" as "donations" (no other legitimate charities are mentioned); that she feels "hampered by the gift tax system" (hey, *don't* take the deduction, if that's the way you feel about it); and, most rousing, that "I registered for the first time in years in order to vote for [Clinton and Gore]" (makes me feel kinda silly for having consistently participated in democracy for the past two decades).

I suppose it would be cynical to suggest that Ms. Rice stands to benefit greatly



Jane Jenson as Juliet in Troma's just-completed *TROMEIO AND JULIET*. See Troma's just-launched Web site and you too can write classic films like this.

from the institution of a flat-tax system, as do many of the very-rich. I suppose it would be petty to note that this letter is less an inspiring bit of public advocacy than a transparently self-serving attempt to further one's own financial agenda, apparently via the offices of a bizarre, you-give-the-Conservatives-their-tax-cut-they'll-give-you-your-health-program sort of exchange. Unfortunately for the best-selling novelist, the most concrete result of this letter may be not to inspire a major shift in national economic policy, but to convince the world that the next time Ms. Rice feels the urge to communicate directly with her public, somebody should promptly and securely tie the woman down. Spanking, in this case, is optional.

TRAILERS

It now appears obvious that Warners is going to release information on *BATMAN AND ROBIN* on a bi-monthly basis. This installment's tidbit: that *PULP FICTION*'s Uma Thurman is now the front-runner for the role of Poison Ivy, while Batgirl will probably be played by *CLUELESS*' Alicia Silverstone. At this rate, by the time of the film's release in '97, we'll be reporting on whether Val Kilmer used Equal or Sweet 'n' Low in his coffee... And did you think B&R would be the only comic-calamity on its way to the screen? *Au contraire*, newsprint-breath! Also coming up: *SPIDERMAN* (still reportedly high on James Cameron's list, and still apparently mired in legal wrangling); Mandalay Entertainment's *FLASH GORDON* (this also an animated series out of Lacewood Productions); and—Oh God, somebody stop them!—*BEETLE*

BAILEY. *Dilbert* is apparently still up for grabs...

While we're on the subject of dynamic duos, it is reported [see page 31] that Jack Nicholson and Tim Burton, who previously teamed up on the original *BATMAN*, will do it again for Burton's upcoming *MARS ATTACKS*. Ol' Jack will pull a *DR. STRANGELOVE* for this one, playing at least two and possibly three characters. Jeez, Cheech Marin pulls the stunt in *FROM DUSK TILL DAWN*, and everybody falls into line... Arnold Schwarzenegger appears to be a go for Atlas Entertainment's *FALLEN*, about a cop tracking down a criminal who, it turns out, is actually the Prince of Darkness. Guy wouldn't happen to be named Kaiser Soze,

would he?... Maybe They Should've Talked a Wee Bit Longer Dept.: Sony, Philips, Toshiba, and Time Warner have now not only agreed on standards for a five-inch, disc-based multimedia system, they also appear to have decided that calling it a Digital Video Disc was just too restrictive. Henceforth, it will be known by the much more lyrical moniker, Digital Versatile Disc... This year's inductees to the National Film Registry, with prints and negatives going into the permanent archives of the Library of Congress, include such genre offerings as Francis Ford Coppola's *THE CONVERSATION*, Robert Wise's *THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL*, UPA's groundbreaking cartoon short *GERALD MCBOING BOING*, and 1896's *RIP VAN WINKLE* (a documentary, no doubt)...

His films were consistently slammed by the critics and he never did any projects that could be considered flat-out genre, but it cannot be denied that the work of producer Don Simpson (who partnered alongside Jerry Bruckheimer) has had an irreversible impact on the film industry. It's an influence that no doubt will be felt long past his death. (Besides, *CRIMSON TIDE* was one of the better films of '95)... A more curious passage was the death of Fearless Nadia, a blond, blue-eyed Australian native who, from the '30s through the '50s built a cult following in India for her role as the Zorro-like Hunterwali. Her films, such as *STUNT QUEEN*, *LADY ROBIN HOOD*, and the apparently genre-based *THE MAGIC OF BAGHDAD* are virtually unknown here. Is there some adventurous distributor willing to take a chance? □

OUTER LIMITS

Debugging second season of Showtime's

By Robin Brunet

By many counts, Year One of MGM/Showtime's *THE OUTER LIMITS* was not a happy experience for cast or crew.

Preferring to dismiss the phenomena as teething pains, observers nonetheless recall squabbles, production difficulties and a general sense of non-communication. "In some ways, it was amazing things got done," said one staffer who wished to remain anonymous. "We didn't have enough time or budget to do what is an ambitious series, so tempers flared."

There was another burden to bear, of course: *LIMITS* labored in the shadow of the Fox Network's *THE X-FILES*, which in 1994 was enjoying more audience growth than any TV series on the air. "Some people assumed the prestige of the original *LIMITS* might rub off on us, but that wasn't the case," said producer Brent-Karl Clackson. "Our parents didn't watch the original, and Generation X doesn't know anything about us—only people of my generation are devotees."

Adding to the irritation was the fact *X-FILES* and *LIMITS* are shot in and around the same city: Vancouver, British Columbia. *X-FILES* supposedly had the best home-grown pool of technicians, dibs on the best local talent, "ins" on the best locations; *LIMITS*, the perception went, did not.

Be that as it may, when *LIMITS* premiered on Showtime a year ago, critics fond of the predecessor praised it for recreating the same sense of wonder, chills, and social insight that captivated audiences 31 years ago. If *LIMITS* was riding the glut of televised sci-fi made possible by *X-FILES*, it was clearly the best of the litter.

Sensing their baby had legs, MGM/Showtime performed some creative house-keeping over Christmas of 1994. New writers, a new co-executive producer, and other key crew members were hired to keep the logistically daunting series from running off the rails (virtually none of the surviving personnel are willing to discuss the Yuletide turfing either on or off the record).



Toronto director Allan Eastman studies the angles on the alien puppet in "Beyond the Veil," a second season abduction story by Chris Brancato.

By November of 1995, visiting the *LIMITS* set in the sprawling Bridge Studios, where it occupies two soundstages and adjoining production offices, was a bracing experience. "Put it this way: it's a lot more pleasant now," said Clackson. "People are talking to one another, and work is proceeding smoothly."

But has it crawled away from *X-FILES*' shadow? From a critical and viewer standpoint, yes. From a filmmaking standpoint—not quite. "*X-FILES*' per-episode budget is over \$2 million, whereas we're allotted \$1.3 million per episode," remarked publicist Carol Marks-George. "We could do a lot with \$2 million. On the other hand, we're doing amazing things with what we've got." Showtime began airing the series' new second season of episodes in January.

A glimpse of shooting "Beyond the Veil," written by Chris Brancato and directed by Toronto resident Allan Eastman (*TEK WAR*, *FRIDAY THE 13TH: THE SERIES* and *ROBOCOP: THE SERIES*), bore this out. The tale of a man (*ROSEANNE*'s Michael O'Keefe) whose flashbacks of an alien abduction drives him to a high-tech institute, where he recreates his ordeal in a horrifying way, is the sort of script complex in motivation and rich in visuals that may well have sparked bitter discourse during year one.

Instead, the most complicated sequences of the script—in which O'Keefe's character inadvertently conjures a flesh-and-blood alien within the institute's 'memory chamber'—are shot by a two-dozen-odd crew with all the precision of neurosurgeons.

"Beyond the Veil" is the eighth of 22 episodes to be produced in Year Two, and it contains requisite on-set effects (high intensity lighting in the memory chamber), computer effects (which not only creates extraterrestrial visions, but more mundane set pieces like rooms and corridors that would otherwise be time-consuming to erect), and costumes (an unsettling thin-armed alien who, for

the sake of staying within each episode's script seven-and-one-half-day filming schedule, has been constructed in two halves so it can be shot from the waist up or waist down, thus reducing makeup time and facilitating mobility).

Actor O'Keefe is a veteran of TV sci-fi makeovers: he has appeared in the updated *TWILIGHT ZONE* and *ALFRED HITCHCOCK* series. As a fan of the original series, his first reaction upon learning *LIMITS* was going to be resurrected "was to throw up. But I'm impressed by what they've done. It has all the twists and *frissons* of the original, and this particular script allows me to create a multi-layered character."

O'Keefe, who said series television "requires you to leap spontaneously into your character," is further impressed that the *LIMITS* crew has fine-tuned production to the point where "they're flexible enough to allow for improv and script changes. In 'Beyond the Veil,' I encounter the alien four times, and the original script had me yelling 'No!' each time. In the dailies this struck me as pretty tedious, and while we were filming the fourth encounter I said to the director, 'Wouldn't it seem more realistic if I tried to strangle the bastard instead?' And to my surprise, that's what we wound up doing."

The ability to tweak and refine the final

TS

cable sci-fier.

product is something producer Clackson is especially proud of. "It's a bonus, considering the logistics of making an anthology," he mused. "Think about it: we have no plot concept. No regular cast. We have no continuity between episodes. There are no standing sets, no regular wardrobe, props or cars. Each episode is a mini-movie. Tweaking and refining helps make each episode stand out from one another. Like the original series."

While O'Keefe and company toil in the memory chamber set, construction workers put the finishing touches on a cold war bunker set in the adjoining sound stage for the following week's episode, "Trial by Fire." "With two stages we are able to shoot one episode and prep the other simultaneously," said Marks-George. "As soon as filming is complete on one set, the construction crew already has it halfway dismantled, and as much as possible it is recycled for the next episode. Recycling is a huge motto around here."

Alternating episodes as visual effects supervisors, first season's John Gajdecki has been joined by L.A.-based Steve Anker, who cut his digital graphics teeth on the TV series DINOSAURS. As Anker oversees the final-draft effects scenes of "Beyond the Veil" in his cramped Bridge Studios workshop, his three-person team is performing last minute refinements on the previous episode, "Straight and Narrow," as well as transferring storyboards for the next episode, "Trial by Fire," to the work-print stage.

"Having two effects supervisors gives us a lot of creative mobility," Anker, a twentyish tow-headed man with a Valley drawl, acknowledged. "Instead of merely cobbling together effects in a computer, we can layer effects one on top of another, like a painter, so that it doesn't seem computerized. To me, there's nothing more off-putting on TV or cinema these days than the 'computer look.'"

Indeed, Anker is working on "Beyond the Veil's" final shot, which resembles a scene from the nightmare cinema of Germany's Fritz Lang more than any slick CGI composite. The shot is a long-pullback of actor O'Keefe in an asylum cell which backs out of a long, dark corridor (itself generated entirely by computer) and into an

continued on page 61



Matt Frewer and Michelle Johnson in "The First Anniversary," based on a story by Richard Matheson. Below: Ryan Slater as the basement-imprisoned genetic defect in the futuristic "Unnatural Selection."



F O R E V E R

KNIGHT

TV's vampire series that has captivated fans of Anne Rice.

By Lawrence
Tetewsky

It began as NICK KNIGHT, a 1988 CBS pilot produced and co-written by James D. Parriott, a frequent collaborator with Kenneth Johnson on THE INCREDIBLE HULK and ALIEN NATION. Rick Springfield starred as Nick Knight, a mysterious cop with the L.A. police who only works the night shift because...he is a vampire! An unlikely premise for anything but a parody, yet Parriott envisioned a dramatic adventure series about a long-lived "monster" trying to make amends for his past atrocities and, more importantly, regain his humanity. The numbers were good for the pilot, but before the series aired, Springfield committed to a pilot and series for DC Comics' *The Human Target*.

Then along came a programming experiment, CBS's CRIME TIME AFTER PRIME TIME—a series to air after the 11:00 PM news Monday thru Friday, which would be more "mature" in approach and subject matter. Read: more violent and sexy for the late night crowd. Titles included DARK JUSTICE, SILK STALKINGS, DANGEROUS CURVES, SWEATING BULLETS and FOREVER KNIGHT, a slightly retooled and recast rendering of Nick Knight's



Geraint Wyn Davies as vampire cop Nick Knight, a cult favorite that began as a CBS pilot in 1988 and now runs in syndication.

adventures with Canadian actor Geraint Wyn Davies taking over for Springfield. The premise remained, but the location (both actual and narrative) moved from Los Angeles to Toronto.

The two-part first season opener, DARK NIGHT, retold the original NICK KNIGHT story, which set up—and apparently resolved—the centuries-old conflict between Nick, trying to "cure" his vampiric condition through the use of an ancient

ceremonial relic, and his "mentor" LaCroix (Nigel Bennett), the vampire who brought Nick over to the undead and refuses to lose his sadistic control over him. Though LaCroix was killed at the conclusion of both pilots, he continued to appear throughout the first season whenever Nick would have cause to remember parallel incidents from his 800-odd years of life and how they related to his current crises, both in his cases for the Toronto police department and his personal life. Although his detective partner Don Schanke (John Kapelos) would remain the same from the Springfield pilot, Nick's other friend, a coroner on the force who knows his secret, became a woman, Dr. Natalie Lambert (Catherine Disher).

FOREVER KNIGHT, which currently airs on USA cable, is really a very clever reinterpretation of the *Interview With A Vampire/Vampire Lestat* premise. Nick, like Louis (Brad Pitt in the recent film), has too quickly come to abhor the excesses and degradations of his immortal existence, and is forever haunted and manipulated by his father, LaCroix (similar to Cruise's Lestat, although Bennett's LaCroix is far more malevolent). They are joined by another of LaCroix's children, the seductive Jeanette (Deborah Duchene), owner of a



Pictured (l to r) with Davies, John Kapelos as Detective Schanke, Catherine Disher as Dr. Lambert.

local nightclub called The Raven, where the vampires come to socialize. Though she originally helped bring Nick over, she surreptitiously tries to aid him in escaping LaCroix's influence whenever she can. Jeanette is just a more mature version of Lestat's Claudia (Kirsten Dunsten), completing the rather bizarre family unit formed by the trio.

Structurally, the format of the episodes, mixing extended flashbacks of past events that mirrored the conflict of the contemporary action, would soon be emulated by other first run syndication series such as HIGHLANDER, KUNG-FU: THE NEXT GENERATION and even ROBOCOP. There are many stand-out episodes in the first season, including a plot to murder an exploited, burned-out rock star, Nick's disastrous attempt to save Natalie's brother's life by making him a vampire, and Nick's efforts to adapt a 12-step program to cure his



Nigel Bennett as LaCroix, Deborah Duchene as Janette and Natsuko Ohama as Captain Cohen. Inset: Vampire adversaries LaCroix and Knight, a battle between good and evil that also rages on USA cable.

WORKING THE NIGHTSHIFT

“A premise unlikely for anything but a parody serves for dramatic adventures of a long-lived ‘monster’ trying to amend for his past and attempt to regain his humanity.”

as “Gore Light.” The moody, retro-New Wave visual style and cinematography captured the mysterious vampire angst of people living on the edge of society and reality perfectly.

FOREVER KNIGHT refused to die when CBS’s experiment with CRIME TIME AFTER PRIME TIME was canceled. Between the network ratings and the show’s excellent

(which is also conveniently shot in Toronto). The only cast member not to return was Gary Farmer as Captain Stonetree. So Nick and Schanke were transferred to another precinct, commanded by Captain Amanda Cohen (Natsuko Ohama from SPEED).

In the first episode of the second season, Nick discovers that he did not immolate LaCroix as he had thought. Apparently, LaCroix is such an ancient vampire that much of the traditional lore of killing a vampire is not applicable to him. Thankfully, LaCroix had decided upon a different approach for bringing Nick back to him. Throughout their history, LaCroix would kill anyone Nick tried to befriend, subvert his attempts at reversion, or just beat him up. In the second season, LaCroix tried to sway Nick with subtly convoluted philosophy, to win him back by deception of thought. The effect is much more chilling and sobering.

Throughout season two, Nick reexamined his desire to become human, impatient with how little progress he’d made and wondering if he could endure all the frailties of being human after being unfeeling for so long. An early episode dealt with a mistake made by both Nick and LaCroix in London, where LaCroix inadvertently created Jack the Ripper, and Nick refused to kill him when he had the chance. Another compelling episode was the origin of Jeanette, where it was revealed she was a French prostitute whom LaCroix saved from drunkards. He promised to give her the power to assure her that no man would touch her unless it was her desire.

“condition.”

Several episodes are specifically built around the excellent supporting cast, fleshing out the characters of Schanke, Natalie, and even the station’s chief officer, Captain Stonetree (Gary Farmer). As John Kapelos (Schanke) is quick to point out, the central strength of FOREVER KNIGHT is in James Parrot’s attention to the integrity of the characters and their relationships. The final episode of the first season, a chilling look at obsession and compulsion in attempting to control a loved one’s life, climaxed with the revelation that LaCroix was still “alive.”

While being at least mindful of some of the classic vampire lore, FOREVER KNIGHT has made certain concessions, while others have been cleverly written into the scripts. Nick’s attempts to regain his humanity have enabled him to be seen in mirrors, and have slowed his healing capacity. He only drinks

animal blood, which Natalie is trying to wean him off of and get him onto real food. He subjects himself to controlled sunlight and can even briefly hold a cross. There is even an elite corp of Enforcers, vampire “cops” who prevent too much specific knowledge about the undead from becoming known.

Unfortunately, no attempt has been made to explain why the vampires are not repulsed by fires, especially in the historic flashbacks. Also ignored are the vampires’ abilities to change into animal forms or mist, although they do fly and have enhanced senses and the ability to hypnotize/influence others. Vampire effects for the first season included rear-projection and aerial rig flying shots, mirrored contact lenses and the obligatory fangs, along with generous supplies of red Vino, a syrup referred to on set



European numbers, bolstered by added nudity and violence, and good response at the National Association of Broadcasters convention, Paragon Productions and Tri-Star were convinced that there should be a second season, this time sold directly to first-run syndication. After a long hiatus, almost all of the original cast and production crew were reassembled for a second season. Added as consulting producers were Larry Lalonde and Phil Bedard, who defected from KUNG FU:TNG

KNIGHT

THE VAM-CAM

Miniature aerial photography takes flight over Toronto for Nick's P.O.V.

By Lawrence Tetewsky

In FOREVER KNIGHT, Nick does a lot of flying, occasionally assisted by wire rigs, rear screens and chromakeys. The second season relied almost completely on the contributions of Steve Gray from Flight Craft Model Company in Kitchener, Ontario. For both seasons of episodes, Gray has provided stunning aerial photography shots of Toronto at night using what he calls the Vam-Cam.

The Vam-Cam is a radio-controlled Colt GS-A helicopter with a 23cc ignition engine. It has a 13-pound payload with a total lifting capacity of 26 pounds. Shock mounted underneath the copter body is a Beaulieu R-16 16mm movie camera. The camera is on a pivot that allows it to pan vertically and horizontally, and has a video-monitor so that the pilot and operator on the ground can see the camera view. The 16mm film allows for a higher and wider depth of focus. A PCM radio-control system allows for frequency isolation, so that multiple bands will not interfere with the controls. In



Lenser Steven Gray with the "Vam-Cam" in his Kitchener, Ontario office.

case of crossed signals, the system automatically locks into a hover mode until control can be regained.

Gray controls the helicopter's flight, while a cameraman shoots the images. A follow spot is used to carefully illuminate the copter at night so that Gray can see where he's flying. The follow spot assists the unit's own self-contained illumination. High-speed film is used for existing light capability, and the camera is crystal synced to eliminate night-time strobing. The

copter can skim very close to the ground or buildings, and can fly up to 30 or 40 stories high. While the controls are good for up to a half-mile range, the effective nighttime limit of visibility is 300-400 feet. The images produced are striking; the illusion of a person's view if he were flying over the city or down the crowded streets is very convincing. City filming is the most treacherous, and the helicopter rig is only stable in winds up to 20 kms. Gray's rig is adaptable to accept even a 35mm camera. □

The "Vam-Cam" in action. Its flights for FOREVER KNIGHT are typically night shoots to provide a bats-eye point-of-view (below).



Lacroix was revealed to be master general in the armies of Pompeii who was brought over by his own daughter, a weak child turned vampire by a mysterious stranger in town. His rebirth was the night Vesuvius erupted.

Technically, the strained full-figure flying shots from season one were drastically reduced, opting instead for more VAM-CAM/point-of-view sequences (see side-bar). While the fangs remained the same, the mirrored contacts were replaced with full-size scleral lenses that have photosensitive dyes between glass layers, similar to the lenses used by John Landis in INNOCENT BLOOD. While the effect is much more hypnotic, the actors were rendered virtually blind by the lenses.

Faring better in first-run syndication, FOREVER KNIGHT began filming a third season in late June 1995, after a somewhat longer-than-expected hiatus and a protracted cycle of repeats and rescheduling during the mid-season. Between the repeats, the Internet and numerous convention appearances by star Geraint Wyn Davies, Nigel Bennett and Deborah Duchene, FOREVER KNIGHT continued to develop a tremendous fan following. After a second season fraught with rumors, FOREVER KNIGHT was finally acquired by the USA Network, with the deal stipulating that USA would premiere each new episode Monday evening at 10:00 PM before any new syndicated affiliates would get them. Strangely enough, local channels already running FOREVER KNIGHT have premiered first-run episodes of season three before USA's regular premiere date.

Unfortunately, USA's acquisition of FOREVER KNIGHT may have proven more detrimental to the series than any of the previous year's random airings and schedulings. USA insisted upon some very major and subversive changes to the cast and relationships. John Kapelos, who played Schanke, Nick's partner, left the show after six years with the FOREVER KNIGHT premise. A multi-award winning author and wicked comic, Kapelos had been slated to write an episode

for the end of season two, and possibly to direct another episode as well. Although series star Geraint Wyn Davies did direct several later season two episodes, Kapelos' script never aired, which may have led to his departure from the show, though he did direct one late season show. Or, he might have felt that his character, having come so close to discovering Nick's unnatural nature only to be dissuaded by LaCroix's logic, had run its course.

In any event, both Kapelos and second season police captain Cohen, played by Natsuko Ohama were killed off in season three's premiere, "Black Buddha." Hoping to hedge its bets against further star defections, USA insisted that Nick's new partner be a woman who becomes involved with another vampire, yet be unaware that Nick is a vampire himself. Detective Tracy Vedder (Lisa Ryder), helping Nick investigate the plane bombing that killed Schanke and Chief Cohen, discovers that only one passenger survived the crash, the mysterious Vachon (Ben Bass). She eventually discovers that he's a vampire, and agrees to keep his secret. Obviously, Tracy and Vachon are being groomed to carry the series should Wyn Davies decide to leave.

Unfortunately, both are extremely light-weight characters. Tracy is a stereotypical sidekick partner, rarely allowed to display much intelligence and only there seemingly to masquerade as a prostitute or *femme fatale*. Whereas Nick always seemed connected to the historical flashbacks and involved in the times, Vachon was merely a bystander, just allowing history to happen around him, without it having much effect on his seemingly endless bacchanal. Therefore, his relationship to Nick in the present is akin to an obedient pet trying to stay out of its master's way.

Just as Nick traveled the years with Jeanette and LaCroix, Vachon also spent much time with an annoying supporting character, Screech, also known as "The Rat Man" (Greg Kramer). Screech is an underground retro-punk Cockney, who speaks lines obviously lifted from *A CLOCKWORK*

REMORSEFUL BLOODSUCKER

"FOREVER KNIGHT is a very clever reinterpretation of Anne Rice's 'Vampire Chronicles' where Nick, like Louis, has come to abhor his immortal existence."



On the case: Davies and John Kapelos as partner Don Schanke. Right: Rick Springfield as NICK KNIGHT in the 1988 CBS pilot that inspired the series.

ORANGE. His terrible diction and delivery are the only reason such gutter language could make it onto the air.

Aside from the addition of Urs (Kristin Lehman), a woman brought over by Vachon who seems totally disconnected from everything, there were two additional cast changes from seasons two to three. Claiming that her part was poorly developed, Natsuko Ohama requested that her Captain Cohen be written out. Taking over her duties at Metro Homicide is Blu Mankuma as Captain Reese, a wonderful character actor familiar to many genre fans as the police captain in the canceled *ROBOCOP: THE FUTURE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT* series.

The most serious casting change, however, was the decision to drop Deborah Duchene's Jeanette. For some inexplicable reason, USA Network felt she wasn't sexy enough. Aside from her exotic beauty and sassiness, Jeanette served as an important counterpoint to Natalie's influence on Nick. The three of them formed a poignant romantic triangle, both tempting Nick with the lure of their respective worlds: Natalie the hope for Nick's salvation, and Jeanette

the wild side of his past life that he still obviously enjoys.

As evinced in the third season episodes aired thus far, with Jeanette gone (and having "left" the Raven Club to LaCroix), the Nick/Natalie relationship can only be explored so far, until it is either consummated or falls apart. Some serious continuity was also violated in terms of their romantic story. In season two's Valentine's Day, Nick began to pay more attention to Natalie, which prompted LaCroix to invoke the consummation of a centuries-old debt, namely that Nick must lose what he loves most, to repay LaCroix's sparing of Nick's sister. LaCroix invites Natalie to a romantic dinner, to deprive Nick of his love. Nick arrives in time, and with Nat entranced, he somehow manages to convince LaCroix that she really means nothing to him. Yet he continues to woo her throughout season two and into season three. In fact, when LaCroix comes to aid a mortally wounded Nick in season three's "Night in Question," neither Natalie nor LaCroix seem to recognize each other.

Midway through the airings of the first half of the season, USA Network is apparently

having some second thoughts about their radical changes to *FOREVER KNIGHT*. Screech and Urs will apparently be dropped. For some inexplicable reason, Tracy Vedder is the network's ideal vision of a new partner, so she and Vachon will continue in their dealings. Most encouraging, though, are the rumors that they are courting Deborah Duchene to return, at least on a semi-regular basis. This could return some depth to what has, so far, been a pretty light-weight season. You know



you're in trouble when the most compelling episode is about a seeing-eye dog brought over to the undead, and how he saves his mistress from her debilitating illness by bringing her over, too.

If nothing else, many of the teasers for the shows have gotten more lurid than ever. *FOREVER KNIGHT* always had a penchant for the risqué, but season three's openers, with strippers and lingerie-clad murder victims slowly being undressed and terrorized is, if nothing else, breaking new ground. More importantly, though, the series appears to be going nowhere. Nick appears to have accepted his vampiric existence, resigned to eternal penance for the lives he's taken in the past. His relationship with Natalie is stalled at a precipice, and even LaCroix seems to have lost much of his mystique and danger. He's gone from charismatic deceiver to eccentric weirdo, spouting his arcane radio ramblings from his converted nightclub.

Hopefully, Parriott will be able to reassert the control so integral to *FOREVER KNIGHT*, and restore the integrity and conflict of the characters if the series is to continue next year. □

s t r a n g e

Director Kathryn Bigelow on her intriguing

By Alan Jones

STRANGE DAYS brings the language of contemporary American literature to the cranked-up science fiction action movie. In the process it reinvents *film noir* for today's more sophisticated audiences raised on TERMINATOR 2 rather than THE MALTESE FALCON. Set on New Year's Eve, 1999, Kathryn Bigelow's confrontational techno-BLADE RUNNER explores the fine balance between visual spectacle as medium and subject. Unfortunately her overpowering "in your interface" signature extravaganza failed to find an audience in America when it opened last September. But as her unflinching look at where virtual reality technology could be headed unspools across the rest of the global marketplace, spearheaded by numerous Festival showings, the director responsible for NEAR DARK, BLUE STEEL and POINT



Bigelow directs Ralph Fiennes as turn-of-the-century cyberhuckster Lenny Nero, a high-concept high-budget boxoffice bomb for Cameron's Lightstorm.

BREAK defended her work.

"It's true American audiences haven't taken to the picture," said Bigelow. "The press loved it, though. It's a complicated movie and it's critical of the environment we live in. I think Americans have found it difficult to take. It scares them. That's if they went to the theatres at all. Bad marketing meant no one really understood what it was about going in. The perception of the piece was muddled. Our exit polls were fantastic, but it was too late by then."

However, Bigelow doesn't see STRANGE DAYS as a bleak vision of our collective near futures. "I'm not a pessimistic type of person, anyway," she said. "The movie ultimately ends with a strong insistence on hope. Angela Bassett and Ralph Fiennes symbolize the end of one world on the eve of the millennium and the beginning of another. The climax provides the tools to humanity that could enable us to create the antidote to a society in distress and out of control. It's a bleak vision of the future only

insofar as it's a cautionary tale, a parable in *noirish* disguise. I think it's more of a wakeup call."

That wakeup call began life four years ago in James Cameron's mind. The director of ALIEN and TERMINATOR 2 was fascinated by the idea of the millennium and what it would mean to the world's population. What he imagined would happen barely four years hence was a rootless society enveloped in an ever-increasing web of paranoia, violence and socio-political upheavals looking for any light relief from their problems. That's what Ralph Fiennes, playing Lenny Nero, does for a living. He sells people's real experiences as software on the black market for virtual reality playback via a hardware device dubbed SQUID. Place it on your head, close your eyes, and you too can see what the human video recorder saw; whatever they were doing, whether indulging in sex or violence, and however it ended—sometimes in death.

"Cameron came up with the SQUID technology," said Big-

elow. "It stands for 'Superconducting Quantum Interference Device' and does exist to some extent. SQUID has been in experimentation since the '50s in the medical community and has mainly been used to electronically stimulate the optic nerve for people who suffer with extreme vision impairment. By no means is it anywhere in the advanced state as seen in STRANGE DAYS. If at all, it's a technology that will be achieved decades from now. Cameron embellished the technology and invented the context and milieu in which it's utilized—about it being originally developed for the Federal Agency to succeed the audio wire as a means of surveillance and gathering evidence."

But Cameron didn't want to direct STRANGE DAYS under the banner of his Lightstorm Entertainment company. He was just about to tackle TRUE LIES and decided to put the project he termed, "a David Mamet science-fiction film" into the hands of Bigelow, a friend since NEAR DARK. As it turned out, Cameron was also unable to expand his ideas into a full script. Jay Cocks was brought in to work on the final screenplay. Cocks, an Oscar nominee for THE AGE OF INNOCENCE, had previously worked with Bigelow on a screenplay about Joan of Arc titled COMPANY OF ANGELS.

"The directing proposal was presented to me around the time of the Rodney King trial," said Bigelow. "Of course, I liked the basic story between two such asymmetrical and atypical characters as Lenny and Mace [Angela Bassett]. That's what first attracted me to this project. The millennium backdrop and the black market technology were also creative turn-ons. But the



James Cameron's Lightstorm Entertainment, which produced STRANGE DAYS, was Cameron's bid for independence which crashed and burned after the huge budget overruns on TRUE LIES and the lackluster boxoffice performance of STRANGE DAYS. After nearly three years and just two films, Cameron's Lightstorm last December sought and won an exclusive production arrangement with 20th Century-Fox that frees Cameron from arranging his own financing or shouldering his own budget excesses. Up next for Cameron at Fox is TITANIC for 1997. After that Fox is attempting to line up SPIDERMAN, Anne Rice's THE MUMMY and TERMINATOR III for their directing superstar.

e d a y s

cyberpunk excursion with James Cameron.

Los Angeles riots had just taken place and, since the setting was L. A., the politics became very important to me. I wanted to be responsible to the landscape as it existed and that's what I brought to the material. Los Angeles is a real cultural polyglot and it was not only essential to the piece, but also the optimum frame of mind for STRANGE DAYS.

"Those themes are what compelled me to make STRANGE DAYS. Plus the two characters: a hustler with an undiscovered conscience, and a guide through the underworld who has the strength, and the love, to survive. The only actress I ever considered was Angela Bassett. I wouldn't have made it if she hadn't responded so enthusiastically to the material. Mace was the anchor for the story, the most centered person, and her being a strong female character was naturally very important to me. Finding an actor who could compete as her equal in similarly complex, intelligent terms was always the problem. Then I saw SCHINDLER'S LIST and Robert Redford made early QUIZ SHOW rushes available to me. Ralph's depth and wide range of emotions impressed me and I knew we had found our Lenny. Both Angela and Ralph were excited about working with each other, too, which helped enormously.

"Although it was a hard film to set up, we did have an ample 18 months of preparation time for going over the logistical problems. That was when we faced our most difficult task of finding the right cast and crew who would believe in STRANGE DAYS 100% as much as we did. We had 77 night shoots in total and you can't buy someone's passion to work on such a punishing

"Angela Bassett and Ralph Fiennes symbolize the end of the world on the eve of the new millennium," said Bigelow. "It's a bleak vision of the future."



Angela Bassett makes an impression as Mace, the hard-as-nails Cameron babe who comes to low-life Nero's aid when his cyberschemes go awry.

schedule and keep their enthusiasm up. Everyone had to really want to make this movie no matter what. That was the hardest accomplishment of all and Angela and Ralph certainly led the way."

Predictably, the main question Bigelow keeps being asked about STRANGE DAYS concerns the virtual reality rape of Iris, played by Brigitte Bako. It's the mystery surrounding her shocking death, and the explosive software she's hidden depicting police brutality, that fuels the central narrative of Bigelow's New Age PEEPING TOM. She sighed, "STRANGE DAYS is a story about the pervasive need to watch and see. It underlines the difference between the viewer and the viewed. The rape is totally unlike the opening robbery, shot in real time and from the subjective point of view of being uncut straight from the cerebral cortex. In that, you are the person running upstairs and across the roof. The rape experience is intercut with Lenny's horrified reactions. He even throws up after watching it. I intercut his reaction of disgust and revulsion to give the sequence a mediation, an interface to attitudinalize the material. My position was clear from the way it was presented. There is no way I condone the actions and my feeling positions the material more comfortably for the viewer. All the other point-of-view shots are extremely pure in their presentation.

"You can't make a movie about watching, without watching. Violence is a fact of our lives. If my movie tends to hold a mirror up to society, my response is you can't fault the mirror. People create violence, movies don't. Nothing is more dangerous than censorship in

strange days

"Two thousand zero zero/ party over /whoops/ out of time," sang the artist currently known as a dumb symbol in his 1982 hit "1999." In a kindred apocalyptic vision of the millennial terminus, Kathryn Bigelow's *STRANGE DAYS* sets itself on the last day of the 20th century during a New Year's Rockin' Eve that would eat Dick Clark alive. Flipping a few pages ahead in the calendar rather than traveling long distance through time, the film is not so much futuristic fantasy as a peek around the corner. Ambitious, provocative, and stylish, it sank like a stone at the boxoffice. *Strange days*, truly. The film hits video shelves for a second chance, this April.

An uncharacteristically seedy Ralph Fiennes plays Lenny Nero, a down-on-his-luck ex-cop who peddles black market video implants called SQUIDS to yuppies and other lowlifes in *fin de millennium* Los Angeles. The commercial appeal of the device is that the visual spectacle is jacked directly into the imbiber's brainstem: you feel, not just see, the adrenaline rush of an armed robbery, a sexual hit-and-run, or, because we humans are such sick puppies, a rape-murder. Overdose on SQUID, however, and you wind up pretty vacant: a mental vegetable, wires crossed and synapses shot. Fiddling while the populace burns their neurons, Nero recites a line of pimp-patter confident that his product is presold by an entire culture dedicated to shameless consumerism and instant gratification. "You know you want it," he purrs seductively.

Also, Lenny has a backlog of memories of his own to contend with featuring the love of his life, the rollerblading Faith Justin (Juliette Lewis), a slutty rock singer who spells bad news even for this bad-luck dude. Back in his (also seedy) apartment, he squirrels away SQUIDS, recording his misty watercolored memories for compulsive lovesick replays, thus defying the first rule of the professional drug pusher: never sample the merchandise. Waiting in the wings as Lenny's guardian angel is limo driver "Mace" Mason (Angela Bassett), whose rough exterior never hides her moonstruck longing for Lenny. As pop star

Bigelow puts the viewer uncomfortably on the spot.



Bassett and Fiennes: caught up in political intrigue and murder when Nero, a peddler of interactive diversions, comes into a snuff film too hot to handle.

Tina Turner in *WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT*, Bassett looked too pumped up for the role of an abused wife (one expected her to haul off and deck Ike every time he slapped her upside the face) but as Lenny's de facto bodyguard and unrequited love, she's splendid—lithe, agile and buffed.

Though the plot concerns an incriminating SQUID CD everyone seems to be looking for, a high-tech McGuffin recording the brutal murder of the famous rap star Jeriko One (Glenn Plumber), the real business of *STRANGE DAYS* is visual, not narrative. Almost painterly in its texture, director Kathryn Bigelow's *cameronian* camera splashes a purple-black *tech noir* color scheme across a horizontal L.A. landscape at night, sort of CNN meets Ridley Scott. Like Nero, Bigelow and producer-screenwriter James Cameron know they're peddling their own brand of SQUID, know that you, the moviegoer, want "it." They deliver the antecedent in a double dose of visual flash and burn: a portrait of

an American metropolis as a multi-ethnic, ultraviolent, and cacophonous netherworld and (the better portion of their stash) a series of mini-movies within the movie that offer up a taste of the visceral thrills, erotic sparks, and sadistic stimulation of the on-screen SQUID trip.

Adopting the classic camera angle for pornography, Bigelow's first person point-of-view shots lock the spectator into the eyeline vantage of the implant addict. No doubt about it, Bigelow soars in these sequences—the highball jolt of the restaurant robbery that opens the film, the mushy romantic interludes with Faith, and the sexplay that puts the spectator right in the saddle. But the film's most wrenching and controversial sequence is the vicious rape-murder of a hapless hooker named Iris (Brigitte Bako), rendered (and hence experienced) from the perspective of the killer and victim. As sadistic screen violence goes, it doesn't get any more hardcore or perverse than this. Speaking for the artistic defense,

Bigelow has mouthed a familiar mantra that the I-am-a-camera thrill kill should be seen as rueful commentary on the escalating intensity and cruelty of computer-age horror shows catering to the ever more exotic appetites of jaded spectators. The film signals the correct moral response when Lenny and later Mace jack into the snuff SQUID and react with appalled revulsion. Still, Bigelow works too hard to orchestrate too many slick cinematic tricks not to be implicated in the unholy rush of the experience she allegedly condemns.

As in a lot of Internet-age science fiction (*JOHNNY MNE-MONIC*, *LAWNMOWER MAN 2*) *STRANGE DAYS* assumes the collapse in perceptible distinctions between actual reality and computer-generated reality. In good McLuhan fashion, the new media are configured as true "extensions of man," total environmental depth experiences that change the nature of the human relationship to the physical world. More and more, the science fiction genre seems a union of two mind-bending authors: Philip K. Dick (time and memory) and William Gibson (the computer-age body and mind). Once a mapped territory inhabited by bug-eyed monsters and killer androids, the science fiction realm is now as dizzyingly complex and disorienting as a graduate course in Hegelian metaphysics. Faithful to Dick-Gibson ethos, the troubled climax of *STRANGE DAYS* refuses to posit a patented conspiratorial solution to its plot complications. Conspiracy would be much too ordered and reassuring to explain a world in the grip of chaos theory.

A dense and disturbing meditation on time, mind, and ultimately love, *STRANGE DAYS* has at least as much style and smarts as *SEVEN* and *12 MONKEYS*, last year's other choice science-fiction-horror releases. Though a bigger financial disaster than *WATERWORLD*, the film should enjoy a long shelf life in repertory and video. To Bigelow, Cameron, and co-screenwriter Jay Cocks it may be small solace and less compensation that *STRANGE DAYS* is the kind of film that needs to be looked back on—say from 1999—to have its virtues appreciated.

Thomas Doherty

my view. We need to hit such issues head-on and look at them in the harsh, cold, cruel light in which they exist. But I was not going to put the rape scene on screen unmediated. I made a judgment call from many perspectives, the main one being I am also a woman. Naturally I'm interested in pushing boundaries and breaking rules, but working within a sense of how far to go. I shot the rape scene in a non-glamorized way to serve the story without pandering to anyone. It's also a comment on cinema because we do go to see films for the vicarious experiences they offer. Why is voyeurism attractive? Why do we need cinema to escape the mundanity of our lives? Within the basic framework of *STRANGE DAYS*, I feel those issues are raised in provocative, hard-edged and ironically gritty ways."

Responsible for the subjective Steadicam point-of-view shots was Jim Muro, who, since directing the low-budget gore movie *STREET TRASH*, has won wide acclaim as the handheld cameraman of choice. Bigelow happily credits Muro for his amazing creative input into all the virtual reality scenes. Elsewhere these sequences used digital paint-out techniques. Noted Bigelow, "Most of the special effects in *STRANGE DAYS* were mainly accounted for in the production design and the camera choreography. In the mirror love scene between Lenny and Faith [Juliette Lewis], the camera and crew have all been digitized out of frame. I shot a reverse plate of the reflected image and the computer stored it as a file to



Fiennes stands out in the crowd of rioting revelers on the eve of a new century, a hunted lost soul marked for death.

paint us all out of the picture. The other new technology I used on *STRANGE DAYS* came in the editing. I cut it on an AVID and I really was only limited by my imagination. It's an instantaneous way of editing as you can see every available configuration. It was as simple as using a mouse and hitting a key. Very freeing actually. As technology advances, so does the medium."

Apart from being a visual experience, *STRANGE DAYS* is also a sonic one. Noted Bigelow, "The music was integral in setting up certain key scenes. I was fascinated by the fact that L.A. had many cultural references and I wanted the music to be emblematic of those hardcore aspects. I involved Peter Gabriel and Deep

Forest at a very early stage. With those artists in mind, I feel I did create a sonic style to reflect the visual intensity of the story. In the case of P. J. Harvey, her music was my way into the character of Faith. Juliette Lewis loved her, too, which was instrumental in her agreeing to play the rockstar role. Juliette mimed to two Harvey songs—'Hardly Wait' and 'Rid of Me'—and I was going to choose the best one to use. However, they were so good I decided to use both in the final print."

STRANGE DAYS hardly shows the LAPD in a good light. Did the production have problems with police cooperation, especially as they would obviously be needed to help control the huge street party finale? Bigelow pointed out, "It's not an indictment of the LAPD at all. It's about two rogue policemen who try and cover up one stupid act of violence. It's an indictment of the misuse of power more than the police. As for their help in the climax, L.A. is a movie-making town and that's what we were making. Four downtown city blocks were closed off and we advertised for people to come along. Roughly 12,000 people did and what with actual New Year celebration footage various crews shot in New York, London and Madrid which played on two

stadium-sized video screens, it did resemble what the script described as the 'mother of all parties.'"

And what will Kathryn Bigelow herself be doing on December 31, 1999? She laughed, "Well, I've already had the party of the century in *STRANGE DAYS* so I'm not sure. I'll probably spend it very quietly. I always find New Year's Eve a time for reflection and this one will be an even more relevant occasion to do so. But, you know, the future starts right now. We don't have to wait four years to implement thoughts and ideas on a better outlook for the next century." □

Bigelow, reinventing *film noir* for today's audiences with a powerful in-your-interface extravaganza.



Juliette Lewis as Faith Justin, Lenny's old flame rock singer, with Michael Wincott as Philo Gant, the source of the "blackjack" snuff entertainments.



GULLIVER'S TRAVELS

Producer Duncan Kenworthy on remaking an oft-filmed classic.

By Alan Jones

In the wake of the huge worldwide success of his production, *FOUR WEDDINGS AND A FUNERAL*, Duncan Kenworthy was asked by *Broadcast* magazine, "What is your greatest regret?" He answered, "Not being able to make *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*." Writer Simon Moore, who'd spent six years adapting Jonathan Swift's classic for Kenworthy, read the interview and immediately called him. "Duncan," he said, "This is the time to do it. You now have the clout. Pick up the telephone and make it happen."

Kenworthy did just that and the resulting ambitious four-hour miniseries, divided into two two-hour films, aired on the NBC network in February. The Robert Halmi-Channel Four Television-Jim Henson production is unique because it's the first ever to present the entire 1726 Swift satire, *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World, by Lemuel Gulliver*. Unlike prior adaptations, from David Fleischer's 1939 animated version to Peter Hunt's 1977 live-action musical, the miniseries encompasses all four of



Gulliver in Lilliput. Kenworthy's four-hour TV mini-series goes beyond this well-known set-piece to tell Swift's tale faithfully for the first time.

Gulliver's bizarre travels on his eight-year journey back to civilization. While it chronicles the surgeon sailor's most famous visit to the tiny bellicose land of Lilliput, and its peaceable counterpart Brobdingnag, land of the giants, it also brings to life less well-known adventures on the flying island of Laputa, with its terrifying sorcerer and the immortal Struldbruggs, and the land of the talking horses,

the Houynnhnms, with their humanoid beasts of burden, the Yahoos.

The production's travails began in 1987 when Umberto Pasolini, an associate producer at David Puttnam's Enigma company, turned up at Kenworthy's Henson office excited about the acclaimed *THE STORYTELLER* series. Said Kenworthy, "Umberto asked me if I'd ever thought of doing an adaptation of *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS* because no one had ever done it properly using all four journeys. He thought *THE STORYTELLER* showed exactly the way to do it. We both put our heads together and commissioned a script after an intrigued Jim Henson and David Puttnam gave us the go-ahead."

Given the job of adapting Swift's merciless send-up of 18th-century royalty and class struggle was Simon Moore, writer of the British Channel Four mini-series, *TRAFFIK* and *THE QUICK AND THE DEAD*. Noted Moore (who also directs), "I was worried Duncan saw it solely in *STORYTELLER* terms—Gulliver relating his adventures at length with some bits of business cheaply dramatized.



Ted Danson stars as Gulliver.

But I relaxed when it became clear we were all on the same wavelength. Everyone was anxious to get away from the children's novel aspect and make it as real as possible.

"*GULLIVER'S TRAVELS* was never a fairy tale despite what most people think. It's a clever polemic on philosophical approaches to life. Duncan always saw it in mini-series terms so we could get to grips with everything and do the book justice. Throughout the six years *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS* has been on the boil, a feature film version has been half-heartedly suggested on numerous occasions. Although it would have been easier to finance, each time we've tackled the thought anew we've ended up realizing it could never be done that way. It would be a compromise."

Moore decided early on not to worry about how the fantastical elements would be achieved—he'd simply dramatize what he thought was necessary to propel the narrative along without thinking in terms of cost or technique. The basic problem was in finding a workable structure to present Swift's bile-filled attack on the human race. This headache led Moore to invent a fifth world for Gulliver.

"I did masses of research and learned Swift had visited Bedlam, the first ever lunatic asy-



Kenworthy's critically acclaimed version aired on NBC-TV early February.

RECLAIMING THE CLASSIC

“Everyone was anxious to get away from the children’s novel aspect and make it as real as possible,” said scriptwriter Simon Moore. “It was never really a fairy tale.”

lum, a month before writing *GULLIVER’S TRAVELS*,” said Moore. “I immediately thought of a framework device in which Gulliver would return home after experiencing these weird adventures and be thrown into Bedlam for being insane. The last episode is a trial where he has to prove his sanity while refusing to admit he made up his fabulous stories. Will he win his wife back or be put away forever? The voyages become a stream of consciousness literally intruding through the cell walls. For example, Gulliver lifts up an imaginary trap door in the floor and enters Brobdingnag. That excited everyone and seemed to be the best way of presenting the story without cheating the audience. I left the satire intact because Swift targeted universal themes, not just those relevant to the court of Queen Anne, and they were still audience accessible enough.”

Armed with what Duncan Kenworthy called “Moore’s absolutely fantastic script,” the producer tried to finance it but met one brick wall after another. Kenworthy pointed out, “Part of the reason it proved a tough sell was because of my own Henson background. No prospective backer could disassociate the project from the Muppets. No matter how hard I tried to convince them GUL-

LIVER’S TRAVELS would not contain any cute, furry creatures, no one could visualize it entirely live action with the special effects primarily aimed at making Gulliver a convincing giant or midget.

“As a result of this consistent rejection, David Puttnam lost interest and everyone at Henson’s got bored with me saying on a regular basis that I’d had an expression of interest in *GULLIVER*; and then nothing ever happened. Jim was content to leave it on the books, though, so we bought Puttnam’s half out as I tried to finance it alone.”

Kenworthy left Jim Henson Productions after the success of *FOUR WEDDING AND A FUNERAL* to set up his own company, Toledo Productions. Yet he couldn’t bring himself to leave *GULLIVER’S TRAVELS* behind. Then, after half-hearted talks with mogul Ted Turner, who was willing to tackle the mini-series at a lower price than Kenworthy felt would do it justice, a major bombshell occurred that would finally give *GULLIVER’S TRAVELS* the green light impetus.

“I was at NBC and learned Robert Halmi [producer of *SCARLETT*, *LONESOME DOVE* and *GYPSY*] had just sold them the idea of a four-hour version of *GULLIVER’S TRAVELS*,” recalled Kenworthy. “The end is

nigh, I thought. Then I found out that, while he’d sold them the concept, he didn’t have a script. I discovered Halmi and Henson shared the same agent, Bill Haver at CAA, and made him send our script over. Halmi loved it and when we met in New York I told him I was only interested in a package deal with Simon’s script as it was; I wasn’t going to revise it or start from scratch—all or nothing. Luckily Halmi was serious about his intentions and we made the deal.”

Directed by Charles Sturridge, *GULLIVER’S TRAVELS* began shooting on location in Portugal on April 17, 1995, and moved to London’s Shepperton Studios for interiors. The outstanding cast included Mary Steenburgen, James Fox, Omar Sharif, Edward Fox, Robert Hardy, Shashi Kapoor, Kristin Scott Thomas, Edward Woodward, Geraldine Chaplin, Alfre Woodard, Sir John Gielgud, Ned Beatty and Peter O’Toole. The actor chosen to play Gulliver was *CHEERS* star Ted Danson.

“Ted is the perfect Gulliver for TV,” said Kenworthy. “It was important to NBC that we attracted someone of Ted’s calibre, someone who would get people to watch what was quite a dark

allegory. His likeable good nature and appealing personality are important factors in getting the TV audience hooked on caring about what happens to Gulliver over the four-hour period.”

Danson himself wasn’t quite so sure. The actor remarked, “I was worried about speaking with an American accent. Why would this Englishman speak theater American? Then the enormity of it overwhelmed me. To be honest, I felt depressed and inadequate during the first four weeks of shooting, especially as these actors of incredible stature were coming in to play three-day parts. Finally I’ve come to realize that in the same way Sam Malone was the audience sensibility of *CHEERS*, and host to the colorful characters in the bar, Gulliver is the audience tour guide through four amazing voyages. I witness the events and through me the audience observes them too. It’s a nightmare balancing act as I’m trying to cross me, Ted, and my 20th-century humor, with Gulliver’s stilted 18th-century dramatic dryness. I can’t go too far in either direction and let one side win out over the other.”

Writer Simon Moore added, “That was always the problem

Gulliver gets pulled under a Lilliputian archway by a team of horses. Effects supervisor Tim Webber filmed on Portuguese locations with motion tracking.



GULLIVER'S EFFECTS

Supervisor Tim Webber on his CGI bag of tricks.

By Alan Jones

Cutting his teeth on GULLIVER'S TRAVELS in the special visual effects department is Tim Webber. The 30 year old learned his craft during the past seven years working at the Frame Store, a London company specializing in post-production digitals for the television industry.

Noted Webber, "I wanted to get involved with GULLIVER'S TRAVELS mainly to work on something longer than 30 seconds that wasn't a soap powder commercial! Although I've worked on a TV opera before, EXTRAVAGANZA DE MEDICI [and some of the costumes from that were reused in GULLIVER], it wasn't very satisfying from a creative point of view. I got interested in special effects because I wanted a career combining physics and the arts. That's what they are when you boil them down. I do like solving the endless problems which arise in this complex field too."

Webber described his workload in GULLIVER'S TRAV-

ELS as "mainly making people either very large or very small. Everything was essentially achieved by shooting on a blue-screen stage and superimposing those images on the four worlds. Nothing dramatic really. My four-man team and I did watch the movies like WILLOW, HONEY, I SHRUNK THE KIDS and HONEY, I BLEW UP THE BABY to see how they handled scale problems with oversized props. We wanted to know what made someone feel big, rather than simply digitally drop them into a background."

However, to allow director Charles Sturridge the artistic license to move during the special effects shots, Webber used the relatively new computer graphic device of motion-tracking. "That's not the same as motion control which uses computerized cameras," said Webber. Sturridge didn't want that because it's a slow, boring and expensive process. On the other hand, motion-tracking puts camera moves in during post-production as opposed to on the studio floor.

"Basically you shoot a series



Danson blows the hat off Nicholas Lyndhurst. Webber's effects consisted mostly of blue-screen work to reduce or enlarge Danson or other characters.

of still plates which are electronically patched together in post-production. Then you can move over it to create a pan or a tilt that wasn't originally there. That's a grossly simplified explanation of the process, but I've also tried to push the technique further. For example, we shot still plates from a helicopter looking down on the ground from various angles. These were for the flying island of Laputa which is supposed to be a mile in the air. I can manipulate those stills digitally in layers so it will look like we are flying over the land, and not just panning across a photo, by changing perspectives within the original plate itself. I've used the same technique in the famous scene with Gulliver tied down on the beach. We pan around Gulliver and then motion-track up to reveal Lilliputians on his chest. I've used motion-tracking before in commercials but never in such a massive way as here because we

have so much material to get through. Because GULLIVER'S TRAVELS is for TV, I can also get away with a lot more. Some of the techniques wouldn't hold up if this were a feature film."

While nothing was a problem for Webber, some shots were trickier than others. "There's one scene where Gulliver has to be pulled on a trolley under an archway by a team of horses," recalled Webber. "There were so many variables on this Portuguese location, what with hundreds of extras and their matching shadows. When you can't control a situation, it's so much harder to fix it in post-production. Trying to convince extras and horses to remain in one limited area because it's best for us to deal with at a later date is not exactly the easiest thing to achieve. I've come to the conclusion that while the early days of CGI technique looked like it was

Left: The flying island of Laputa. Center: Gulliver watches as Alexander the Great steps out of the sorcerer's mirror. Right: Talking with a Houynhnhm.



simplifying things, the reverse is now true. It's gotten just as complicated as everything else. I feel CGI works better in conjunction with the full canon of other older techniques. The key is to keep the audience guessing so their minds don't have time to fix on how it's being done."

Webber's main job during principal photography was telling the director and camera crew what they could and couldn't do. "I would suggest certain little changes which would make things easier for us in the long run," said Webber. "My workload was mainly during the 16 weeks of post-production once the final edit had been decided on."

During this intensive period Webber had to solve the problem of the sequence where the Sorcerer summons Alexander the Great back from the dead to impress Gulliver. "Alexander had to step out of a mirror, so his reflection had to be walking backwards away from it too," said Webber. Then there were the endless discussions on how to get the intelligent equine Houynhnms to speak. Webber remarked, "Manipulating the horses' lips was something we could have done but it meant lots of work. We made the decision not to lip-sync, but to subtly change the horses' faces digitally to give them believable expressions to match what was on the soundtrack. We filmed the horses performing separately so we could group them in the same frame at a later date."

Webber pointed out, "During the six weeks of pre-production we had, [director] Charles [Sturridge] was adamant. He didn't want to swamp GULLIVER'S TRAVELS in amazing special effects. It was my task to create visuals that added to the story, not ones that would make people stop in their tracks to gasp, 'How did they do that?' It's sometimes been a rush to solve problems quickly—often a completely different one than you were expecting because the schedule changed so much from day to day. But it had been an exciting learning experience for me even though my original estimate of 300 digital shots at storyboard stage was a ridiculously naive calculation. It will probably be double that." □

SWIFT'S TIMELESS FANTASY

"I left the satire intact because Swift targeted universal themes, not just those relevant to the court of Queen Anne," said Moore. "It is still audience accessible."



Danson's audience with the Emperor of Lilliput. Effects to reduce or enlarge Danson may be nothing new, but their scope and number are unprecedented.

with Gulliver. He's not a dramatic hero because satire is a reactive entertainment. Ted is very experienced in that area, though. I trusted him to find the subtle comedy in my lines. Do I have a problem with Ted playing Gulliver? No, because he got it made. Can you imagine how deeply frustrating it is for people to keep saying a script you've worked on for six years is the best thing you've ever written, yet no one will back it? I knew getting this off and running meant a move into popular areas that could have had repercussions over what exactly Gulliver represented. NBC's choice of Ted Danson let us off lightly in my opinion and I have the greatest admiration for what he's achieved."

Helping Danson was director Charles Sturridge who, prior to working on THE STORYTELLER, helmed BRIDESHEAD REVISITED to rave reviews. Noted Sturridge, "I'd heard about GULLIVER'S TRAVELS during one of Duncan's periods in the wilderness three years ago. He officially asked me to direct in December 1994. I was of two minds for a variety of reasons. It was obviously going to be a complicated

undertaking and I wasn't sure about the parentage. I mean popular NBC and minority Channel Four could hardly be more different and I didn't want any political crises erupting during the shoot. But I adored the script. I felt the long form TV drama was perfect for the subject and I love Duncan as a producer. I know what his interests are and I respect him. It was the Duncan factor which swung it. We started pre-production on January 1, 1995, and were contracted to deliver the print on December 31, so it had a great sense of completeness to me."

Sturridge had never directed a fantasy before GULLIVER'S TRAVELS. He still hasn't. "I don't see it in those terms," he said. "Gulliver travels to four completely real worlds with no fantasy at all. One of the reasons why Swift's book is such an enduring attack on the establishment is because he supported his story with painstaking detail and fascinating minutiae. He goes to great descriptive lengths and that's why his book goes beyond its stated intention and gives you a real glimpse of other worlds. Translating that schematically meant accenting the reality above everything

else. The emotional drama depends on whether he's telling the truth or not during his insanity trial so an air of reality was a vital component. I wanted truth in the adventure and to give the story back its verisimilitude after being [mis]appropriated by children's fairy tale literature and the fantasy genre."

Added Sturridge, "Swift was the least likely person to write a children's classic, which is the main reason we aren't making one! His book is clearly anti-military, an attack on science that wasn't serving the people's needs, and the side-tracking of human knowledge for the common good into stuffy academia. It's a very powerful mix of anger, disgust and big morality issues. The reason I know all this is because I immersed myself in everything Swiftian once I came aboard. In my research I found an essay I'd written at college when I was 17. It was titled 'The Satire of Gulliver's Travels' by C. Sturridge. On the bottom my tutor had written rather superciliously 'a competent survey, may be of use to you later.' Who would have guessed he'd be absolutely right!"

Kenworthy wanted Sturridge's involvement because "he's technically so well prepared. His experience on commercials meant he was intimate with the technical side and therefore I knew he'd relax about the special effects and help the actors as much as he could. Charles storyboarded everything to help make the overall concept jell. To be successful, and to keep the audience from realizing how an optical effect was done, we asked questions like, 'If Gulliver really was 72 feet tall, how would we shoot it?' Charles went for that realistic approach and I don't think we took an obvious choice in any key area as a result."

"After seven years of trying to do GULLIVER'S TRAVELS properly I wasn't going to compromise on any aspect at such a late stage in the game. Nothing is ever a breeze—in TV especially—and the 16-week schedule we had was one of the toughest I've ever faced. But the final product is brilliant and my passion and belief in it over the years has been fully justified." □

REVIEWS

FILM RATINGS

- Must See
- Excellent
- Good
- Mediocre
- Poor

CASTLE FREAK

Directed by Stuart Gordon. Full Moon Video. 11/95. 94 mins. With: Jeffrey Combs, Barbara Crampton, Jonathan Fuller, Massimo Sarchielli, Elisabeth Kaza, Luca Zingarelli, Raffaella Offidani, Jessica Dollarhide.

It continues to look as if Stuart Gordon had a lucky hit early in his career and has not been able to catch lightning in a bottle again. This promisingly titled horror, which actually stars two of REANIMATORS leads (Jeffrey Combs and Barbara Crampton), turns out to be a dull, plodding soap opera. Thirty tedious minutes drag by before you even catch sight of the titular creature (Jonathan Fuller) and then the movie shoots its bolt all at once, as the poor deformed thing bites off its own thumb in order to escape from some shackles. After that it's straight back to Plodsville. Optic Nerve has done an OK makeup job on the creature, but it is glimpsed so briefly so late in the running time, it's not much compensation for staying awake for the 90 previous minutes.

● Judith Harris

THE INVADERS

Directed by Paul Shapiro. FOX TV. 11/95. With: Scott Bakula, Elizabeth Pena, Richard Thomas.

This two-part miniseries was touted as a successor to the 1960s' television show of the same name, but this was pure publicity ballyhoo: Roy Thinnes has an amusing cameo in his famous role as "David Vincent," but otherwise the connections are tenuous at best. More action-thriller than sci-fi, this is just another "unseen aliens among us" TV show—albeit less exciting than THE WAR OF THE WORLDS or THE X-FILES—and the open-ended conclusion of the mini-series attests to Fox's hopes of a continuation.

The show's minimal plot is padded enormously to fill up four hours (less commercials) spread over two nights. The bulk of the running time is spent setting up Scott Bakula as a pawn of an alien conspiracy to take over the earth. It seems he has an undetectable device stuck up in his brain which makes him obey the aliens' orders (sometimes).

There are a number of effective performances, the production values are good, although there are no spectacular effects, but the slow pace, uninspired script and direction, and the lack of closure make this pretty much a bust as entertainment.

●● David Wilt

IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE II

Directed by Roger Duchowny. USA Pictures. 1995. 120 mins. With: Brian Kerwin, Elizabeth Peña, Jonathan Carrasco, Bill McKinney.

Wow! Where did this come from? Well, don't get your hopes up. This mundane sequel falls flat in every category. Actually the best moment is the opening footage from Jack Arnold's original film of the space craft's crash-landing in the desert. Billed as an updated version of the '50s' 3-D classic, the new film offers a set of boring characters played by forgettable actors with not even a nod to 40 years of advances in special effects.

Jack Putnam (Brian Kerwin) befriends Stevie Fields (Jonathan Carrasco), a local fatherless boy, the most obnoxious kid you can imagine without a lovable bone in his body. You only hope he gets eaten by



Bill McKinney as a replicant and Lauren Tewes in USA cable's dreadful non-sequel 42 years after the fact, IT CAME FROM OUTER SPACE II, not worth watching.

something. On a desert photo shoot with the kid, Jack witnesses the crash of a spaceship. No one, of course, believes him. Soon the inhabitants of the small, rural community begin acting strangely, having been replicated by the aliens.

Don't expect state-of-the-art Xenomorphs. Those neat, quickly designed, shadowy aliens have been replaced by blue rocks. The only interesting addition has been the replicant web that snares their human prey while the visitors from outer space try to get off the damn planet. Let's hope that THE RETURN OF THE MOLE PEOPLE or THIS ISLAND EARTH, REVISITED aren't waiting in the wings.

● Dan Scapperotti

MOTHER

Directed by Frank LaLoggia. Triboro Ent. 1995. 90 mins. With: Diane Ladd, Olympia Dukakis, Morgan Weisser, Matt Clarke, Scott Wilson.

After drawing attention with his promising first film, FEAR NO EVIL, and then fulfilling that promise with his fine follow-up, THE LADY IN WHITE, director LaLoggia falls a little short of going three for three with this, his latest effort. A fine cast delivering strong performances somehow fail to elevate this rather familiar tale of a troubled mother and the lengths she'll go to in order to keep her son within her obsessive grasp.

The film often feels like a stage play, offering a small cast and a handful of locations, along with the kind of showy roles that actors often love. To his credit, LaLoggia uses all this to his advantage. As he did in both his prior efforts, the director manages to create a tangible ambience for the world his characters inhabit. The real problem is that while the actors and director manage to sustain our interest throughout the rather low-key telling of the tale, there is never any real payoff. A surprise revelation at the end is all too apparent.

●● John Thonen

ROUJIN Z

Directed by Hiroyuki Kitakubo. U.S. Manga Corps. 4/96. 80 mins. Anime with English dubbing.

It's understandable why U.S. Manga Corps

would want to billboard Katsuhiro Otomo's involvement in this anime feature—he scripted the project and did mecha design, even if he didn't direct. Those expecting the epic sweep of AKIRA, though, should be forewarned: this is Otomo in a more antic mood, emphasizing comedy over apocalypse in a tale of a government project gone horribly wrong. Beginning with the government's plan to consign the aged and infirm to do-all, robotic beds, the animated feature traces what happens when the all-too-obedient prototype—a machine actually based on a military design—decides to take its charge's wish to see the beach very seriously. What with the suggestions of a government willing to condemn the under-privileged to the deadening mercies of machines (the bed, in its non-ambulatory stages, looks like nothing so much as a high-tech coffin), and a scenario that has the AI-charged robot absorbing whatever technology it needs in order to accomplish its "mission," this plays like a cross between ROBOCOP and the nihilistic, heavy-metal action-fantasy TETSUO: THE IRON MAN.

The film begins to lose steam once you figure out where it's all going, but by then, Otomo has succeeded in sneaking in some subtly subversive licks, including the introduction of a trio of horny, septuagenarian computer hackers, a memorable scene in which a government functionary has to communicate with the robot via the medium of a sound-activated, dancing cola can, and one of the weirdest here-we-go-again fade-outs in film history. Fun, and worth a look while waiting for the release of the real Otomo film, MEMORIES.

●● Dan Persons

SPIRIT OF WONDER: MISS CHINA'S RING

Directed by Hongou Mitsuru. AnimEigo. 1/96. 45 mins. Anime with English dubbing.

Something was quite literally lost in translation in this English-dubbed, anime fantasy. While the screen presents a charming tale of an Asian bar-keeper in Wales and her tribulations with a mad-scientist lodger and his love-smitten assistant, the soundtrack too often offers up awkwardly phrased and frequently over-acted dialogue that seems to be doing its damndest to foul the delicate mood of the piece. If you can concentrate less on the words and more on their import, this animated short is a rather pleasing mix of gentle fantasy and turn-of-the-century science fiction, centering on a miraculous telescope that can expand and reduce an object's physical form, as well as change its image. Some nice, steamy punk-style imagery here, especially the sight of Miss China and her lover, Jim, cuddling—Winsor McKay-style—on top of a miniaturized moon.

●● Dan Persons

3RD ROCK FROM THE SUN

Directed by James Burrows. NBC. 1/96. 30 mins. With: John Lithgow, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, French Stewart, Kristen Johnson, Jane Curtin.

If you ever wanted to see the talented John Lithgow mugging to high heaven, then this comedy series might appeal to you. Lithgow stars as High Commander Dick, head of a group of malaproping extraterrestrials who call themselves the Solomon family. Typically, the aliens have a hard time understanding English, human feelings and behavior, and they exhibit a tendency to act inappropriately. Dick's actions toward a professorial co-worker played by Jane Curtin, which border on sexual harassment, are mistakenly believed to be cause for merriment. The most clever thing about this almost mirthless MORK & MINDY rehash are some of its graphics of dancing planets.

● Dennis Fischer

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MONSTER MAIL

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difference in the world. They had some of my home movie footage that I wanted incorporated in that body of work, and I think he did a superb job."

Karloff reports that relations are warm, harmonious, and close between the Karloff, Lugosi, and Chaney families. "We see each other socially, and we license things together, and we develop projects together," she said. □

BURTON & SELICK

continued from page 31

Warner Bros. executives were also alarmed at the direction Tim Burton's version was taking, when the budget estimates were reportedly heading towards \$100 million. After scouting locations in Washington and Oregon, Burton's start dates were pushed back, until the budget was brought down to Earth (a more reasonable \$65 million). While waiting for a green light, Burton met with ILM's computer graphics personnel, and scrubbed the planned stop motion in favor of using CGI.

"Tim set up a stop-motion unit," revealed Selick, "but for a variety of reasons, he decided he'd be better served by going with

ILM for the effects. One of the problems is, he wanted to shoot it in CinemaScope, and that's very difficult to do in stop motion, because you have to convert all the cameras. Tim retains an interest in stop motion, but whether he'll get around to using it again, I don't know."

Selick is philosophical about his split with Burton, although a quote by him in *Vanity Fair* ("If you work with Tim, you're going to be bloodied and hurt and bent out of shape.") seemed unduly harsh to some. Selick said he wasn't misquoted. "In fact, I talked to Tim since that came out, and he thought it was an accurate assessment. For some people making movies is like going to war. James Cameron is really brutal and tough on people. Tim's not worse than that, but he's of that same school. In a high-budget film, there's an enormous pressure to make things work. If you're spending \$60 million to make a movie, it's like you've got a gun to your head, even if you can pretend it's not there. It isn't easy for anyone."

Interestingly enough, the Mars Attacks! cards, like *James and the Giant Peach* first appeared in 1962, and both feature insect-like

characters, hence their suitability for stop motion. Burton's film will feature a high-powered cast that reunites him with his BATMAN star, Jack Nicholson, who will play the President of the United States. Lukas Haas will portray a reefer-smoking Kansas youth, who helps save the world from the Martians. Jim Brown plays an ex-heavy-weight boxing champion, who greets guests at a Las Vegas casino, which comes under Martian attack. Pierce Brosnan plays a top scientist, who like Robert Cornthwaite in THE THING, urges the President to greet the alien invaders peacefully, despite their overtly hostile actions.

Meanwhile, Phil Tippett will be reteaming with director Paul Verhoeven on another "insect invasion from outer space" picture, Robert Heinlein's STARSHIP TROOPERS. Further on down the road, Pixar will be doing a computer-animated follow-up to TOY STORY, entitled BUGS. It would appear, at the moment, that insects are the hottest commodity in Hollywood. □

OUTER LIMITS

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open area where the audience sees a honeycomb of similar cells. The

camera draws back farther past Gothic stone vaults and becomes airborne, revealing the honeycomb of cells to be just one of thousands of honeycombs clustered together in the bowels of some impossible penal colony.

"This is the kind of stuff we do every week," Anker remarked with more than a trace of pride. The exact cost of such creativity remains undisclosed—all Clackson would say about digital effects is "they don't save time or money."

Clackson, considered a Vancouver industry veteran with several high-profile credits (WISEGUY, HIGHLANDER) under his belt, is convinced year two will knock the socks off viewers: "Everything is better. We understand what the audience wants and what the scripts are. I don't think we can scare people the way the original series did, because it's incredibly hard to scare a '90's audience who have seen it all on the big screen. But I promise we will blow people's minds with the endless possibilities of the sci-fi world the way the original did."

The filming of year two wraps in May, fulfilling MGM/Showtime's commitment to 44 episodes, but renewal for additional seasons is a possibility. □

LETTERS

SCIENCE FICTION FILMS' POWER 50

While I realize that it should be obvious that what you mean is "Science Fiction in the Media," given what magazine the list is published in, there is really no indication of this, except for a brief, oblique reference in the second paragraph of the text. Nevertheless, I rather wish you had made the distinction a little more prominently. There is, of course, a great deal more to science fiction than science fiction in the cinema. Taking the broader definition, there is really not a single person on the list who has the power to "make or break the genre." In movies and TV, that may perhaps be true, but science fiction *per se* existed long before Hollywood and would continue to exist even if not a single additional science fiction film were ever made. Indeed, science fiction literature manages to perk along quite happily independent of what's going on in film or TV.

It is a long-held and unfortunately still valid opinion that science fiction in the cinema is always two or three decades behind what is being written. The exceptions to this rule are far too few to shake the truth of that theory. As I look at the 50 names in the list, I see no one who has actually made a real contribution to the growth and development of *science fiction*. Movie and TV science fiction, perhaps, but to the genre as a whole? Hardly.

It is at best ironic that many of the most successful of the filmmakers owe the success of their work to published science fiction—that is: many of the best science fiction films were derived directly (such as 2001, BLADE RUNNER—or THIS ISLAND EARTH, for that matter) or indirectly (such as STAR WARS) from the literature. There were no cyberpunk films until that subgenre was invented by novelist William Gibson. Historically, any influence or inspiration has percolated from the literature to film and TV, never the other way around (discounting trivia such as novelizations of popular films).

Quibble number two: your definition of science fiction is so broad as to be almost meaningless, since your list includes many people whose works can scarcely be

called science fiction by even the most generous stretch: Sam Raimi and Robert Tapert, John Lassiter, Stephen King, Tim Burton, Michael DeLuca or Wes Craven, for example.

Ron Miller
King George, VA 22485

DESECRATING RICHARD WILLIAMS

I was pleased to see you give proper space and recognition to directors Terry Gilliam and Richard Rich [27:6:14]. Contrary to what many critics have assessed, Gilliam's creative talents extend into far more areas than just special effects and, likewise, Rich has achieved far more with THE SWAN PRINCESS than just "imitating Disney."

However, I was disappointed (in the Rich article "Can Anyone Dethrone the Disney King") with writer Mike Lyons citing Miramax Films' release of Richard Williams' THE THIEF AND THE COBBLER (retitled ARABIAN KNIGHT) as a positive accomplishment of sorts. Yes, it may have signified the new emergence of animation titles by many different studios, but Lyons forgot to mention the *rest* of the story: that Miramax made severe cuts and redubbing of the film that left it scarcely resembling Williams' "labor of love" of over 20 years. It was a butchering reminiscent of the fate of Orson Welles' THE MAGNIFICENT AMBERSONS, an action definitely unworthy of any praise or note.

Mary Ann Giordano
Warren, MI

[Williams' film has become so well known among animation enthusiasts through the years that any discussion of the current state of the industry without mention of it, would have seemed incomplete. ARABIAN KNIGHT is an entertaining and visually exciting film, exploring the limitless boundaries that only animation can provide. However, I do agree that Miramax's "butchering" of the film is evident and keeps ARABIAN KNIGHT far from perfection. Such matters were mentioned in my review of the film, which appeared in the January issue [27:4/5:12]. Maybe some day home video or laser will yield a director's cut, allowing audiences to finally see Richard Williams' true vision.]

Mike Lyons]

WHY THEY NEVER KILL ANYONE ON "STAR TREK"

Not long after I read Ira Steven Behr's interview [about the killing of Bareil in DEEP SPACE NINE (27:4/5:103)], I met a volunteer for the "Friends of Vedek Bareil" campaign. An international effort has arisen to return the character. More than 80 fan clubs and publications are involved so far. Kira has had nothing to do all season and as Kira goes, so goes DEEP SPACE NINE. Bareil's return would give her the frontburner status she deserves and that DEEP SPACE NINE needs.

Janice Ross
Salisbury, MD 21801-3205

TOO HARD ON STAR TREK?

It seems that your authors constantly forget that their initial goal was not (I hope) to put STAR TREK down, nor to scare potential audiences off the screen [27:4/5]. Sometimes it looks as though they caught themselves in the last moment—often to rather ridiculous results. After the statement like "the crew of *Voyager* is bland as vanilla," or the one about DEEP SPACE NINE's incurable claustrophobia and inwardly static quality, the cheerful conclusion that even so both shows can "fill the void" in science-fiction genre comes as a bit of a surprise. . . . The synopsis of DEEP SPACE NINE's third season by Dale Kutzera could pretty well raise in anyone new to the show reasonable question: why pay attention to such rubbish at all? According to Mr. Kutzera, there is hardly a couple of watchable—let alone good—episodes in the whole season.

And what makes THE NEXT GENERATION adventures placed mostly inside the ship less claustrophobic than DS9's, where the other quadrant is involved?

Anna Fainshtein
London, England

FILLING THE GOTHIC GAP

When are you going to do an article on AMERICAN GOTHIC? I adore THE X-FILES, just like everyone else, but there is another very interesting other-worldly show starring a very talented Gary Cole, and I haven't seen but a few snippets of information on this show in most of the TV/movie magazines. This, despite the fact Gary Cole has carried three major

mini-series (FATAL VISION, ECHOES IN THE DARKNESS, and SON OF THE MORNING), as well as two TV series (MIDNIGHT CALLER and GOTHIC). I hope to see more in your excellent magazine on this very talented actor and his interesting CBS series.

Pam Stockbarger
Reseda, CA 91335

[We have a piece on AMERICAN GOTHIC we will be running in the future.]

BABBLE ON BABYLON 5

I am an avid fan of your annual double-sized recap issues for STAR TREK. I also enjoyed your recent recap issue of THE X-FILES. You produce an excellent magazine. BABYLON 5 has been treated to two issues so far, but I am writing to request an annual recap double-sized issue for BABYLON 5. I have been following this show since it began and the third season has been phenomenal! The writing and the special effects are blowing the STAR TREK shows right out of the water. It really deserves more coverage and support than it is getting. It would be a real shame to let such a fine show go into cancelation and from things I've heard, it very nearly did. Please consider devoting one of your recap issues to BABYLON 5 and support a true quality science fiction show. There are not very many that come along and B5 needs the support of fans.

Bruce Lee Clydesdale
Philadelphia, PA 19115

[Another issue devoted to BABYLON 5 is in the works.]

GIGER PHOTO

Photo credit to Louis Stalder for the image of Giger's commemorative SPECIES sculpture [27:7:17] was inadvertently omitted. We regret the error.

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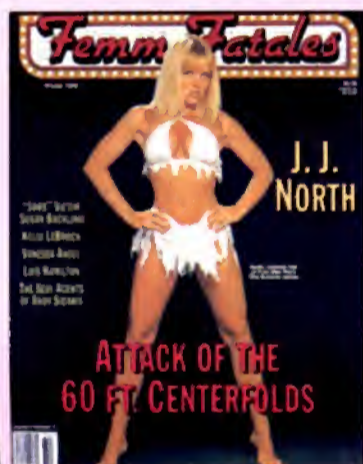
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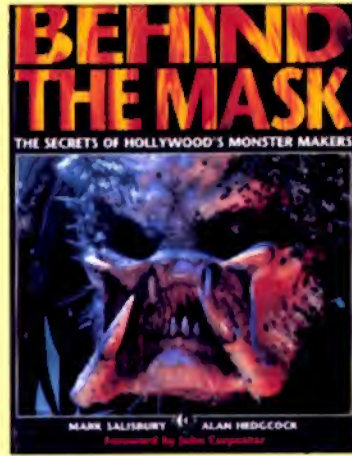
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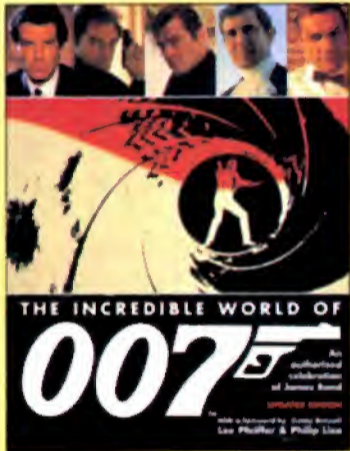
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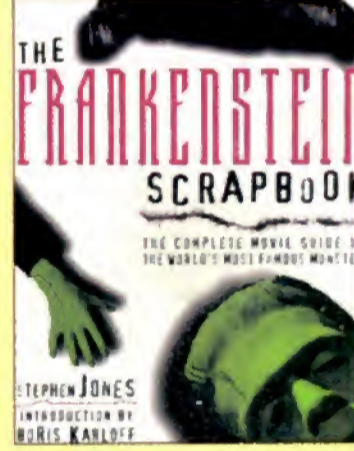
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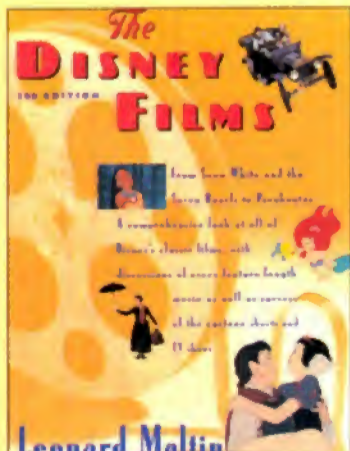
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